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SEVERAL

DISCOURSES

PREACHED AT THE

TEMPLE CHURCH.

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By *THO. SHERLOCK*, D.D.

Late Master of the TEMPLE.

Now Lord Bishop of LONDON.

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DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE I.

Acts xv. 1, 2.

And certain Men which came down from Judea, taught the Brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the Manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small Dissention and Disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and Elders, about this Question.

WE learn from the Text, and other Parts of Holy Writ, That the earliest and purest Times of the Gospel were not free from Disputes and Controversies in Religion: That the Authority of the Apostles, tho' confirmed by Signs and Wonders, was not sufficient to lay the Heats and Prejudices of Men; which, like ancient In-

habitants, having Poſſeſſion and Preſcription to plead for their Right, were with great Difficulty removed: That the Apoſtles themſelves, however agreed in one and the ſame Doctrine, were of different Opinions as to the prudential Methods of dealing with the Oppoſition they found; ſome giving way to the Torrent, that Men might have Time to cool, and recover the Calmneſs of Reaſon and Judgment; others endeavouring reſolutely to ſtem the Tide, and not to give way, *no, not for an Hour, that the Truth of the Goſpel might continue.* Hence aroſe the Conteſt between *Peter* and *Paul*; ſo that, as the Apoſtle of the *Gentiles* himſelf tells us, *he withſtood Peter to the Face.*

To the ſame Cauſe likewiſe we may aſcribe much of the preſent Difficulty and Obſcurity of the Books of the New Teſtament: For the Writers being neceſſarily drawn into Controverſy by this means, which always has, and in the Nature of the Thing muſt have, Reference to the Opinions and Prejudices of the Diſputers; there are many Things in Scripture which appear dark to us, for want of a diſtinct Knowledge of the Errors and Miſconceits which the Writers oppoſe; many Things delivered down to us, in which it is not eaſy, at firſt Sight, to diſtinguiſh how far the holy Penman argues upon the Truth

of

of our common Chriſtianity, and how far upon the Principles and Conceſſions of his Adverſary. From whence it has come to paſs, that ſome Things have been taught by unſkilful Interpreters of Scripture, as the Doctrines of Chriſtianity, which were no better than the Errors of Judaizing Converts.

Theſe Difficulties, thus woven into the Holy Writings, have furniſhed even to learned Men conſtant Matter of Diſpute and Controverſy; and ſome Points have laboured under a Difference of Opinion in moſt Ages of the Church: And ſo far has Length of Time been from diminiſhing theſe Diſputes, that every Writer of Name and Authority has enlarged this Field of Controverſy; and to examine, adjuſt, and expound the Sentiments and Opinions of Men of Renown in the Church of God, who have gone before us, is left as an additional Labour and Study, and oftentimes as a freſh Matter of Contention.

Add to theſe Cauſes already recited, the Paſſions, the Weakneſſes, and Prepoſſeſſions of Mind, which the beſt Men are not free from; and which darken and obſcure Things in themſelves oftentimes clear and intelligible; and you will have before you, perhaps, a juſt Account of the Cauſes

which have filled the World with ſo many Doubts and Differences in Opinion concerning the weightieſt Matters of Religion.

But ſince from this Account there appears little Hope of coming to an entire Harmony and Agreement of Opinion, what muſt an honeſt Man do? Whom ſhall he chuſe to follow? And, when he has choſen, with what Security and Confidence can he proceed? ſince there will be always ſome to tell him, That he is a blind Follower of a blind Leader. How far this Difficulty has been preſſed, even to the rendring all Religion precarious and uncertain, and to the diſcarding the Goſpel itſelf, which is repreſented as encumbered with ſo many Doubts, ſuch different Comments and Expoſitions, that the Wit of Man knows not how to extricate him from this Labyrinth, and lead him to one Spot of firm Ground, whereon to reſt the Sole of his Feet; how far, I ſay, this Argument has been urged to this Purpoſe, I need not ſay: It will be more to our Purpoſe to call this Matter to a fair Examination, and to aſſert the Grounds and Principles of our Faith, notwithſtanding this fierce Aſſault that has been made upon them.

Now there are two Things which this Argument leads us to conſider; and which, when

when fairly ſtated, will, I think, exhauſt the whole Difficulty.

The firſt is with reſpect to the Revelation itſelf; to conſider how far theſe Difficulties affect the Authority of the Goſpel: For if it is, as it is repreſented, ſo very dark and obſcure, that common Honeſty, with the Aſſiſtance of common Senſe, cannot diſcern in it what is the Will of God; then it cannot be a Rule or Meaſure of Religion, or deſigned as ſuch by God, who is too wiſe and too good to give Laws to the World, which can be of no uſe to them, but to perplex and confound their Underſtandings.

The ſecond is with reſpect to Ourſelves, to conſider how we may attain to a certain Rule of Religion, under the Goſpel Revelation, notwithſtanding the many Controverſies and Diſputes, which are too viſible to be denied, and oftentimes too fierce to be excuſed.

And if it ſhall appear upon the whole, that theſe Difficulties do not affect the Authority of the Goſpel, nor preclude us from the certain Knowledge of the Faith and Obedience required under the Goſpel; then, whatever Uſe may be made of theſe Controverſies, they cannot in Reaſon be urged as Objections againſt Revealed Religion, the Certainty

tainty of which, either as to its Authority, or the Clearneſs of its Doctrines, is no way impeached by them.

The firſt Thing is, to conſider the Authority of Revelation, and how it is affected by any Difficulties or Obſcurities that are found in it.

The Authority of Revelation depends upon this, That it is the Will and Word of God; and he that knows he has the Word of God, knows that he has a Revelation of certain Authority. The firſt Queſtion then is, Whether this Knowledge may be attained, before we have a diſtinct and explicit Underſtanding of all the Parts of the Revelation? If it may, then it is certain that the Obſcurity of ſome Parts of the Revelation cannot deſtroy the Authority of the whole. We know very well, in all ordinary Caſes, that theſe are two very diſtinct Acts of Knowledge, and not in the leaſt dependent upon one another, To know who ſpoke ſuch Words, and To know the true Senſe and Import of thoſe Words. One Man may certainly know who ſpoke them, though he knows not the Meaning of them: Another may know the Meaning of them, without knowing who ſpoke them. In Revelation the Caſe is the ſame: Our Saviour

viour ſpoke many Things in Parables, which the Diſciples underſtood not, and which he afterwards explained to them. Now I would aſk any Man, Whether the Diſciples did not as certainly know that thoſe Parables were the Word of Chriſt, before he explained them, as they did afterwards? If they did, thoſe Parables were to them of the ſame Authority, though not of the ſame Uſe, when they were obſcure, as when they were explained. In human Laws the Caſe is the ſame: The Authority of them depends not upon their being diſtinctly underſtood by all Men; for the Man, who has no Ability to expound a Statute, may yet be certain of its Authority, if he will have recourſe to the proper Records. And there are many Statutes of this Realm, the Authority of which no Man doubts of, though, at the ſame Time, thoſe who are beſt able to judge are not agreed in the Meaning and Expoſition of them: And what would you think of a Man, who ſhould affirm that we have no Statute Book in this Kingdom, or none of any Authority; and give you this Reaſon for it, becauſe that which we call our Statute-Book has many Difficulties and Obſcurities in it, many Things

which are not to be reduced to a certain and determinate Meaning? And yet the Argument is as good, nay, juſt the ſame, in this Caſe, as when it is applied to Revelation; and a Man argues with the ſame Shrewdneſs, who tells us we have no Goſpel, or none that we ought to admit, becauſe the Goſpel we pretend to has many difficult Paſſages in it, many Things that are hard to be underſtood: For the Obſcurity of ſome Laws is as good an Argument againſt the Authority of the Statute-Book, as the Obſcurity of ſome Texts is againſt the Authority of the Goſpel.

This will further appear to be true, if we conſider the proper Proofs of a Revelation, and how they operate: For they will be found to take Place, and have their full Effect upon the Mind, antecedently to our having a diſtinct Underſtanding of all the Parts of a Revelation: And conſequently our not having a diſtinct Underſtanding of all the Parts of a Revelation is no Objection to the Authority of a Revelation, which is founded upon Proofs the Objection cannot reach. Now theſe Proofs are three: The Qualities of the Perſon who is ſent to make the Revelation: The main End and Purpoſe of his Coming: And the Miracles which he gives in Evidence of his Commiſſion. If the

Perſon

Perſon be ſufficiently qualified to be entruſted with ſo great Charge; if nothing appears to make it juſtly ſuſpected that he is a Deceiver; if no private Views, no Self-intereſt, no Ambition are diſcoverable; if he be in all Reſpects ſuch an one as we may reaſonably ſuppoſe God would make Choice of to ſend on his Errand: If the End and Deſign of his Coming is ſuch as we may well ſuppoſe God to be the Author of; if it tends to promote the Honour of God, and true Religion, to ſecure the general Happineſs and Welfare of Mankind, without any partial Views and Regards: If his Miſſion be atteſted by ſuch Signs and Wonders, as plainly point out to us the Hand of God ſupporting and encouraging the Work; if they are openly ſhewn before Friends and Foes, and attended with ſuch other Circumſtances, as are neceſſary to place them above Suſpicion: In this Caſe we have a certain Evidence of the Miſſion and Authority of this Perſon to make known to us the Will of God, and are bound to receive what he ſhall publiſh in God's Name, as the Law of God. Now all theſe Proofs we certainly may have, without being able to underſtand, or fully comprehend, all that ſuch a Perſon delivers; and yet, in Force of theſe Proofs,

we

we are bound to believe what he delivers to be the Word of God. Men do not ſpeak accurately when they ſay, the Doctrines are proved by Miracles: for, in truth, there is no Connexion between any Miracles and Doctrines: Miracles prove the Authority of the Perſon, and the Authority of the Perſon is the Ground of receiving the Doctrine. Now it is one Thing to know the Authority of the Perſon, another Thing to know what he ſays. His Authority makes what he ſays to be Law, and your Want of Knowledge in the Meaning of what he ſays will not unmake the Law: For if it could, Ignorance would be the ſupreme Authority, ſince no Authority could make a Law, which Ignorance could not repeal. How far we are concerned in theſe Obſcurities, or what Obligations they lay upon us, which perhaps may be none at all, is another Queſtion: But I think it is evident that no Body of Laws, human or divine, becomes void and of none Effect, becauſe ſome Parts are hard to be underſtood, or not to be underſtood. And if Men diſpute upon ſuch Places, and divide into a thouſand Opinions about them, ſuch Diviſions do ſtill leſs affect the Law,

which

which owes not its Authority to the Agreement or Diſagreement of Interpreters.

But it may be ſaid, and I think very juſtly, To what Purpoſe is any Thing delivered as Law, or Revelation, which is too obſcure to be underſtood? The very End of the Law is, to be the Rule of our Actions; and how is this End to be attained, whilſt we continue ignorant of the Meaning of the Lawgiver? Men may blunder, and make dark Laws, and ſo miſs the Scope they aimed at; and the Wonder is not great: but how ſhould any Obſcurity darken the Law of God? ſince we cannot but ſuppoſe, from the very End and Nature of a Law, that his Intention was to be underſtood; and his Wiſdom permits us not to doubt but that he was able to explain his Meaning.

This brings us to conſider the Fact, Whether the Goſpel has ſuch Difficulties and Obſcurities in it, as may make us eſteem it unworthy of the Wiſdom of God.

The Chriſtian Revelation is contained in the Books of the New Teſtament; but they are not all of the ſame Kind, nor do they fall under the ſame Conſideration in this Queſtion. Had Men given themſelves Time to think coolly, and to make the true

true Separation in this Caſe, we had not perhaps been told, that the Difficulties of ſome Parts of the Scripture are an Objection to the Revelation itſelf.

The Books of the New Teſtament may be conſidered either as Hiſtorical, as Doctrinal, or as Controverſial, and ſome as a Mixture of the two laſt. By the Hiſtorical, I underſtand, the Narrative of our Saviour's Life and Death, and of the Preaching of his Apoſtles after his Reſurrection and Aſcenſion. Theſe, as they are merely Hiſtorical, afford none of thoſe Difficulties which are ſo much complained of: The Story is plain and ſimple, and the different Accounts of it, in the ſeveral Goſpels, vary no more from each other, than may naturally be expected from different Pens.

By the Doctrinal, I underſtand, thoſe Matters of Faith, and Rules of Duty, which do not regard this or that particular Caſe, but were intended for the Uſe of the whole World, and are to continue to the End of it. And if there be a clear Law, and clearly expreſſed, in the World, this is the Law. Can Words more clearly expreſs the Honour and Worſhip we are to pay to God, or can more familiar Directions be given in this Caſe, than are to

be found in the Goſpel? Is not Idolatry clearly condemned in the Goſpel? Is there any other Thing relating to divine Worſhip, that we yet want Inſtructing in? Are not the Duties likewiſe, which we owe to each other, made evident and plain, and can there be any Diſpute about them, except what ariſes from Luſt, or Avarice, or other Self-Intereſt? As to the peculiar Benefits of the Goſpel, are they not declared without Obſcurity? Can you read the Goſpel, and doubt whether Chriſt died for you, whether God will grant Pardon to the Penitent, or his Aſſiſtance to thoſe who aſk it; whether he will reward all ſuch in Glory who continue the faithful Diſciples of his Son? What other Revelation do we want, or can we deſire, in theſe great and weighty Concerns? Or, what is there wanting to make up a complete Syſtem of Religion? Theſe Things you read in the Goſpels, theſe Things you read in the other Writings of the Apoſtles; in theſe there is a perfect Harmony and Conſent of all the inſpired Writers.

But ſtill, you ſay, there are Difficulties in Scripture. And ſo there are: But they are ſuch as do not interfere with the clear

Reve-

Revelation made by Chriſt. The Controverſial Parts of Scripture, ſuch I mean as combat the particular Opinions and Errors of the *Jews* or others, are in many Places dark, and hard to be underſtood: But had there never been any Diſpute with the *Jews* or others, had all obeyed without Diſpute, the Goſpel had been perfect; and is perfect ſtill, however Divines, or others, may differ in expounding the Particulars incident to thoſe Debates. Had St. *Paul* ſaid nothing of Election, or Reprobation (and, as theſe Terms are generally underſtood, nothing perhaps he has ſaid) our Goſpel had not been leſs complete; ſince theſe Points, however underſtood, make no Alteration in our Duty, and they ought to make none in our Faith. It was a proper Part of the Apoſtles' Office to root out the Prejudices and Errors which ſtood in the way of the Goſpel of Chriſt: and whilſt they were diſputing with *Jew* and *Gentile*, and proving that Jeſus is the Chriſt, they were doing the Work of their great Maſter. Theſe Writings, conveyed down to us, are of ineſtimable Value, and worth our utmoſt Pains and Study to underſtand, being Tranſcripts of that Wiſdom with which the Apoſtles were endowed.

They contain the great Doctrines, and the great Proofs, of Chriſtianity; in which Points they are not only of the greateſt Authority, but have likewiſe the greateſt Clearneſs: The particular Diſputes which are intermixed refer often to Principles and Opinions, which we can hardly, at leaſt not ſurely, diſcover; and when Men apply Things pointed to one ſingle View by the Apoſtles, which View they have no clear Sight of, to the general Doctrines of Chriſtianity, no Wonder if they diſturb the Whole, and ſpread Confuſion over the cleareſt Parts of the Goſpel.

To this Conduct have been owing many of the Diſputes which have perplexed the World; and Men have forgot the plain Parts of Scripture, while, to the utter Ruin of chriſtian Charity, they have worried one another about the obſcure ones. To give one Inſtance of this: If there be any Thing plain in any Book in the World, this is plain in Scripture, *That without Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee God:* This is the Foundation of all Religion, the Ground upon which the Revelation itſelf is built; and yet who is there that wants to be informed, that Doctrines deſtructive of this great Article have been advanced upon the Authority

thority of Scripture? Who has not heard that good Works are not neceſſary to Juſtification? and heard St. *Paul* quoted for a Voucher? not where he is delivering the general Doctrines of Chriſtianity, but where he is beating down the particular Miſtakes of his Countrymen. As to theſe Parts of Scripture, happy is he who underſtands them, for he ſhall diſcover much of the Wiſdom and Juſtice of God in his Dealings with his ancient People, the People of the *Jews*: But he that underſtands them not, has this Comfort, That his Salvation, his Religion, depends not upon any Controverſy that concerned the *Jews* only, but upon the plain Declarations of God made to all Mankind.

Thus much may ſerve to ſhew, how far the Difficulties and Obſcurities, which really are found in the Holy Scripture, do affect the common Cauſe of Religion: And I think it is evident, that our common Religion ſtands clear even of theſe Difficulties.

Other Difficulties there are, which more properly belong to religious Men, than Religion: Such are the Diſputes and nice Enquiries of the Schools, which often enter into the Debates of learned Writers.

But

But it is ſtrange to find theſe urged as Objections againſt the Goſpel, by any ſober-minded Man. For what are theſe Diſputes to the Goſpel? God has promiſed his Aſſiſtance to all who endeavour to ſerve him; is there any Difficulty in underſtanding this? Let the Schools conſider the Nature of Grace, and how it influences the Mind, and divide it into an hundred Sorts, what is that to the Goſpel? or what is it to a Man who is aſſured that God will aſſiſt him, and who knows that God cannot want Means to make good his Promiſe?

In like Manner there are many Doubts about the Sacraments of the Goſpel, and how and what Grace they confer: But, diſpute as you will, this one Point is clear, *He that believes and is baptized ſhall be ſaved.*

Suppoſe this, you will ſay, to be true, and that theſe Doubts and Difficulties do not affect the Authority or Truth of the Goſpel; yet they are ſo blended with the Cauſe of Religion, that they are not eaſily ſeparated from it by unlearned and unſkilful Men: And this at leaſt renders the Goſpel of little Uſe, ſince it is a Rule, the Streightneſs of which cannot be diſcerned by the Generality of Mankind. And this brings me to my ſecond Head,

To conſider theſe Difficulties with reſpect to Ourſelves.

From what has been already ſaid it is evident, That the Scriptures contain a plain and intelligible Syſtem of Religion; And would Men follow the Directions of what they do and may underſtand, and not think themſelves under Direction of what they do not underſtand, there would be no great Difficulty in this Caſe. But the Misfortune is, that Men often fancy they underſtand what they do not, and raiſe Rules and Principles of Religion to themſelves out of Places of which they are perfectly ignorant: And how can this be avoided? In the firſt Place, It is at every Man's Peril, if he makes any Rule to himſelf, contrary to the plain expreſs Commands of God which he does or may eaſily underſtand. In human Laws, the Main of the Subject's Duty is plain; and if he miſtakes any dark Paſſages, yet ſo as to keep ſtrictly to his known Duty, the Conſequence perhaps may be tolerable, and he excuſable: But if a Man from any dark Statute ſhould infer a Right to rob and murder his Neighbour, and act accordingly (which Acts of Violence are plainly forbid in the Law) he ought to ſuffer, not for miſunderſtanding the obſcure Law, but

but for tranſgreſſing the Plain one. The ſame Reaſon holds as to the Divine Law: If a Man takes care to obſerve what he does underſtand, his Miſtakes may not be dangerous; but if he forms to himſelf a Liberty from the obſcure Places, inconſiſtent with the plain intelligible Laws of the Goſpel, and acts accordingly; thoſe plain Laws, which ſhould have been his Rule, will be his Condemnation.

But plain Places are not equally plain to all Capacities, and therefore even in this there may be a Latitude; a Latitude which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the Judge, both can and will: And the great Difficulty which Men make to themſelves in this Caſe, ſeems to me to ariſe from a Miſapprehenſion of the Judgment of God. Among Men all are judged by the ſame Rule, one Law comprehends all, and is of the ſame Interpretation and Extent in all Caſes. That it is ſo, is the Effect of human Weakneſs; for in Truth and Equity, if we could come at them, no two Caſes are perhaps exactly alike, or equally ſubject to the ſame Rule: But Men cannot allow for the different Capacities and Circumſtances of Men, which they cannot judge of; and therefore all who

are eſteemed to have Reaſon enough to govern themſelves, are concluded under one Law; and only Children, Ideots, and Madmen are excepted Caſes. Though in truth the Degrees by which Men approach to Madneſs, or Folly, could they be limited, which they cannot, would deſerve a diſtinct Conſideration.

Now if you conceive the Judgment of God to be like the Judgment of Man, and that all ſhall be tried by one and the ſame Rule; no Wonder you aſk, how ignorant Men ſhall come to the Knowledge of their Duty under the preſent Doubts and Difficulties which cloud Religion.

But the Truth is this; God, who gave all Men one Law, gave every Man that Share of Reaſon which he enjoys: Fools are capable of receiving no Law; and no Man is further capable than in Proportion to the Degree of Reaſon which God has given him: And conſequently, in Truth and Equity, the Law is no further a Law to him, than his Reaſon is capable of receiving it. And ſince Reaſon comes as much from God, as the Law itſelf; it is wrong to imagine that the true Senſe of the Law is the only and the ſingle Rule by which God will judge: Since it

is evident in Equity and Juſtice, That the Sentence on every Man muſt ariſe from the complex Conſideration of the Law, that was before him, and the Degree of Reaſon, which he had to apply it.

This great Difficulty therefore, I beſeech you, truſt with God; and doubt not but that the righteous Judge of the World will do righteouſly.

DISCOURSE II.

EPHESIANS ii. 18.

For through him we both have an Acceſs by one Spirit unto the Father.

THESE Words, rightly underſtood, will give us a diſtinct Conception of the Nature of the Chriſtian Religion, as it ſtands diſtinguiſhed from all others, whether Natural, or pretending to Revelation. All Religions pretend to give Acceſs to God, by inſtructing Men in what Manner to approach him by Prayer and Supplication: How to pleaſe him, and obtain his Favour and Protection, by ſuch

Works as each Religion accounts to be holy and acceptable to God: And how to reconcile ourſelves to him, after having offended him by our Tranſgreſſions, through Sorrow and Repentance, or ſuch other Means as have been deviſed and inſtituted as effectual to this End. But the Acceſs to God, which the Goſpel opens to us, is to be had only under the Guidance and Direction of God's Holy Spirit, and in the Name, and through the Mediation, of God's own Son. This Acceſs is the only one which the Chriſtian Religion knows any Thing of; for we cannot come to God, but by his Holy Spirit, and through his Son: And this is what no other Religion does or can pretend to.

The End of all Religion is manifeſtly this, To pleaſe God by ſerving him according to his Will, in order to obtain of him Happineſs in this World and in the next: For the Belief that God is the Governor of the World, and the Giver of every good Thing, is the Foundation of all the religious Worſhip and Honour which are paid to him. All Religions being thus far the ſame, they differ when they come to preſcribe the Method, and to appoint the proper Means by

by which God is to be ſerved and applied to.

Two Things there are, which muſt neceſſarily be regarded in the Choice and Appointment of theſe Means; the Holineſs and Majeſty of God, and the Nature and Condition of Man: For unleſs the Means preſcribed are ſuch as are ſuitable to the Holineſs and Majeſty of God, he can never be pleaſed by them; for whatever is contrary to his Holineſs, or injurious to his Majeſty, muſt ever be an Abomination to him. On the other hand, The Means of Religion muſt likewiſe be adapted to the Uſe of Man, muſt be ſuch as he can practiſe, and ſuch as, his preſent Condition conſidered, will enable him to ſerve God acceptably; for without this, how proper ſoever the Means may be in themſelves, yet they can be of no Uſe or Service to him.

If we examine all the Schemes of Religion which either prevail in thoſe Parts of the World where the Goſpel is unknown, or which are ſet up in Oppoſition to the Goſpel where it is known, we ſhall find that they ſplit upon one or other of theſe Rocks. The *Gentile* Religion is inconſiſtent with the Holineſs of God, as mixing impure Rites

and

and Ceremonies with its Worſhip, and allowing the Practice of ſuch Vices as even Nature abhors: It is injurious likewiſe to his Majeſty, as dividing the Honour, which is due to him alone, among the Creatures; teaching Men to pay religious Worſhip to thoſe who by Nature are not Gods. On the other ſide, Natural Religion, which ſeems to be the moſt growing Scheme, and is ſet up in Oppoſition to the Goſpel; taking its Riſe from the Purity and Holineſs of God's Nature, and the eſſential Difference of Good and Evil, preſcribes a Worſhip pure and holy; but it preſcribes it to Men who have loſt their Purity and Holineſs, and are no longer able to perform the rigorous Conditions: It requires Brick, without allowing Straw; exacting of Men, in their preſent degenerate State, the Purity and Holineſs of uncorrupted Reaſon and Nature: It affords no Strength or Aſſiſtance to Men, to ſecure againſt Sin; and when they have ſinned, it cannot give them any certain Aſſurance of Pardon and Forgiveneſs: So that Men, not being able to perform its Conditions, and having no Security of the Mercy of God without performing them, can have no ſettled Peace or Satisfaction in it.

From theſe two Conſiderations plainly appears the deplorable Condition of Mankind without the Interpoſition of God by a new Revelation of himſelf to the World: For after the utmoſt Efforts that you can make to frame a Religion in all Reſpects proper, you will ſtill find that it will be defective in one or other of theſe Reſpects. If you require ſuch Degrees of Holineſs from Men, as may render their Service acceptable to the holy God, you will require what they cannot perform; and thereby preclude them of any Acceſs to him: Or if you conſult the preſent Powers of Men, and require no more Righteouſneſs, than they by their Strength can arrive at; if you indulge the Paſſions which you cannot correct, if you allow the Vices you cannot reform, if you tolerate the Infirmities which you cannot remove: By thus adapting Religion to the Condition of Men, you will render it too impure to be accepted by God, who *is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity*; and the Communication between Heaven and Earth will ſtill be ſhut up againſt all ſuch who *hold the Truth in Unrighteouſneſs.*

The Chriſtian Religion alone has effectually provided againſt both theſe Caſes: It

requires a Worſhip ſpiritual, pure, and holy; its Laws are juſt and righteous, but abate nothing of the ſtricteſt Rules of Reaſon and Morality; it exacts from us not only an outward Obedience and Conformity in our Actions, but it ſearcheth the very Heart and Reins, and requireth *Truth in the inward Parts*; it reſtrains every diſſolute Thought of our Minds, and every inordinate Deſire of our Hearts. On the other ſide, that the gracious Purpoſes of God may not be defeated by the Weakneſs and Infirmity of Men, it has provided proper Remedies for every Want: It has brought down from Heaven the Pardon of God to all the Sins of Men, which was ſealed with the Blood of its great Author, the ever-bleſſed Son of God: It has reconciled us to our offended Father, and conferred on us anew the Spirit of Adoption: It has put us under the Direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our Fellow-Labourer in the Work of God, and who ſo effectually helpeth our Infirmities, that *when we are weak, then are we ſtrong*; who is our Stay in Proſperity, and our Support in Adverſity, and the undivided Companion of our ſpiritual Warfare, leading us through Chriſt to God, who is the End of all our

Hopes. And, as it has thus ſtrengthened and enabled us to draw near to God, ſo has it likewiſe as effectually ſecured our Acceſs to him, through Chriſt, who *ſitteth at the right Hand of God, to make continual Interceſſion for us*; to offer up, and by himſelf to perfect, all our Prayers and Praiſes, before the Throne of God; to ſupply all our Wants, to confirm our Faith, to ſtrengthen our Virtue, and to make our Repentance available to the Remiſſion of our Sins; and, at the laſt, if we perform the Conditions on our Part, to receive us into the Kingdom of his Father for ever.

The Uſe I would make of the Text, and of what has been already diſcourſed on it, is to obſerve to you,

Firſt, That theſe Means of Salvation, which the Chriſtian Religion has provided, were neceſſary to the Life of the World, the State and Condition of Man conſidered.

Secondly, That theſe Means being neceſſary, it was likewiſe neceſſary to reveal to Mankind the Doctrine concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that the Belief of theſe Doctrines is neceſſary to every Chriſtian, as far as the right Uſe of the Means depends upon

upon the right Faith and Belief of the Doctrines: For, as the Apoſtle to the *Hebrews* tells us, that whoever *comes to God, muſt believe that He is*; ſo likewiſe, whoever comes to God through Chriſt, in the Spirit, muſt believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of God, and of Chriſt, and able to direct him; that Chriſt is the Son of God, and able to bring him to his Father. And by this Means ſhall we be able to juſtify to ourſelves the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in revealing this wonderful Knowledge to Men, inaſmuch as he did it, not to impoſe arbitrarily upon their Faith and their Underſtanding, but in order to perfect and render effectual their Salvation.

First, I would obſerve to you, That theſe Means of Salvation which the Chriſtian Religion has provided, namely, the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit, and the Mediation of the Son, were neceſſary to the Life of the World, the State and Condition of Man conſidered.

I would not here be underſtood to affirm, That theſe Means were ſo abſolutely neceſſary in themſelves, that God could not by any other Method ſave the World. The Wiſdom and the Ways of God are infinite

and

and unſearchable: We cannot, and therefore ought not to pretend to ſet Bounds to them. To enquire, in what other Way God might poſſibly have ſaved Mankind, will neither make us wiſer in this World, nor happier in the next.

What I would then be underſtood to mean, is this; That the Condition of Man before the Coming of Chriſt was ſuch, that he could not, by the Help of Reaſon and Nature, ſo apply himſelf to God, as to be ſecure of his Pardon and Mercy; but there was a Neceſſity of providing other Means beſides thoſe of Reaſon and Nature, which no one could provide but God alone: That he has provided us with the Aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, and appointed his own Son for our Redeemer and Mediator. Some Means being therefore abſolutely neceſſary to be provided, and theſe being the Means made choice of by God; we may ſafely affirm, without prying too far into the hidden Myſteries of God, That theſe Means were neceſſary to the Salvation of the World.

The Truth of this Propoſition thus limited is that which does moſt plainly ſhew us the Reaſonableneſs of the Goſpel, and the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God in the Revelation

of

of it: For, ſuppoſe the contrary to this to be true, That Men were able of themſelves to do the whole Will of God, and ſo to apply to him as to engage his Favour and Mercy, and to obtain Salvation for themſelves at his Hands; and you will find it very hard to account for the Reaſonableneſs of the Chriſtian Religion, which provides preternatural Aſſiſtances to enable us to do that which Nature can do without them; or for the Wiſdom of God, in making the Revelation to ſerve thoſe Ends which Men knew how to accompliſh without it. But, if you conſider Man in the State under which the Scripture repreſents him before the Coming of Chriſt, loſt to God and to himſelf, the Slave of Paſſion, and the Servant of Sin, equally unable to govern himſelf, and to ſerve his Maker; you will then ſee the Want there was of a Mediator to be the Ambaſſador of our Peace, and to reconcile us to God; you will then ſee the Want there was of the Holy Spirit's Influence to enable us to ſubdue thoſe unruly Paſſions and Appetites, which were a Partition-Wall between us and our God; that we might ſerve our Maker in Spirit and in Truth, and *perfect Holineſs in the Fear of God.*

Give

Give me Leave to ſtay here a little to repreſent to you the Oeconomy of God in the Goſpel Diſpenſation, which the Apoſtle, in the Text, has ſhut up in few Words; *We have Acceſs to God, through Chriſt, by the Spirit.* To give you a diſtinct Conception of this, and of the different Offices of the Son and of the Spirit, you muſt conceive the Spirit of God as always preſent with us; the Son, as always in the Preſence of the Father. The Spirit dwells with the Faithful, to guide and to direct them, to ſecond and encourage all their good Deſires, to help them in overcoming their Infirmities, in a Word, to labour together with them, in the Work of their Salvation, to make their Calling and Election ſure. The Son of God is at the right Hand of the Majeſty on High; there he is our Advocate, he intercedes for us, he receives and offers up our Prayers, he obtains for us the Remiſſion of our Sins in Virtue of the one Oblation which he once made of himſelf upon the Croſs, the Memorial of which is ever in the Sight of God. This will teach us what it is, to *have Acceſs by the Spirit, through Chriſt.* For the Spirit abideth with us, he

is at our right Hand, and by his happy Influence it is, that we draw near to Chriſt, and by him approach to the Father. The Son is our High-Prieſt, clothed with Majeſty and Power, and ſeated at the right Hand of God, able to ſave all who will come to him; through whoſe powerful and always prevailing Mediation and Interceſſion the Way is opened to Pardon and Reconciliation. The Spirit is our Comforter, given us to dwell and to abide with us, to be a Principle of new Life within us, to quicken our mortal Bodies, that, dying to Sin, we may live unto God through Holineſs. To draw Men to God, is the Work of the Spirit, who therefore reſides and dwells with Men: To reconcile God to Man, is the Work of our High-Prieſt, who lives in the Glory of God, making continual Interceſſion for us.

And now, conſider the calamitous Condition of Mankind under what View you pleaſe, you will always find a proper Remedy provided by the Mercy of God. If you reflect upon the Holineſs of God, and his Hatred of Sin and Iniquity, and begin to fear that he can never be reconciled to Sinners; take Courage, the Work

is difficult, but the Son of God has undertaken it; and how great ſoever the Diſtance between God and you is, yet thro' the Son you may have Acceſs unto him. If ſtill you fear for yourſelf, that all may again be loſt through your own Weakneſs, and Inability to do good; even here Help is at Hand, the Spirit of God is your Support, he is the Pledge and Earneſt of your Redemption. But,

Secondly, Theſe being the neceſſary Means of Salvation, it was likewiſe neceſſary to reveal to the World the Doctrines concerning the Son, and the Holy Spirit: And the Belief of theſe Doctrines is neceſſary to every Chriſtian, as far as the right Uſe of the Means depends upon the right Faith and Belief of the Doctrines.

He that hath the Son, ſays St. *John*, *hath Life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not Life*; and again, *Whoſoever denieth the Son hath not the Father.* For ſince we can only come to the Father through the Son, to deny the Son, is to cut off all Communication between us and the Father. The ſame may be ſaid of the Bleſſed Spirit, through whom we are in Chriſt: *If any Man*, ſays St. *Paul*, *have not the Spirit*

of Chriſt, he is none of his: Our bleſſed Lord has himſelf told us, *That this is eternal Life, to know the only true God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom he has ſent.*

When we were to be put under the Conduct of the Spirit, and all our Hopes depended upon our Obedience to, and Compliance with, his holy Motions; was it not neceſſary to inform us who this Spirit is? to let us know, that he is ſufficient to the Office allotted him; that, knowing perfectly the Mind of God, even as the Spirit of a Man knoweth the Things of a Man, he is able fully to inſtruct us and to direct us in the Ways of God; that, being infinite, and unconfined in Time or Place, he is equal to the extenſive Charge committed to his Care, and can be ready at all Times, and in all Places, to ſuccour the faithful Servants of God; that, being the Spirit of Power and of Might, he is able to reſcue us out of all Dangers, and protect us againſt all the Powers and Principalities of the Kingdom of Darkneſs. It may be hard, perhaps, to human Reaſon to conceive, that this Holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, and ſo intimately united with God, as to know the

Mind

Mind of God as perfectly as the Spirit of a Man which is in him knoweth the Mind of Man; but it would be harder ſtill to believe, that the Spirit could do what is aſcribed to him in Scripture, without believing him to be this great and glorious Perſon. It is a more rational Act of Faith, to expect from the eternal Spirit of God the Sanctification of our Souls and Bodies, ſpiritual Aid and Aſſiſtance in all our Trials and Temptations, and whatever elſe is neceſſary to our Salvation; than it would be to expect the ſame Things from any other Spirit, of whoſe Power and Attributes we knew nothing. The Power and Mightineſs of the Spirit, made known to us by God, is a reaſonable, a juſt Foundation for the Hope and Confidence we have in him; but, were we ignorant of his Power, our Truſt in him would be without Ground; and we ſhould loſe this Boaſting, which is now the Glory of our Faith, That *we know in whom we have believed.* Since therefore, by the determinate Counſel of God, the Redemption of the World was to be the Work of his Son; and the Sanctification of it, the Work of his Spirit; he has dealt with us more like reaſonable

Creatures, in declaring to us the Dignity and Power of the Perſons in whom we are to truſt; than he would have done, had he required of us the ſame Faith and Reliance on thoſe Perſons, without declaring to us how able and powerful they are to help us. If therefore it be reaſonable for God to ſave the World, by redeeming it by his Son, by ſanctifying it by his Holy Spirit, it cannot be unreaſonable for him to make known his Son and his Spirit to the World, that all Men every-where may by the one Spirit of God, and through the only Son of God, approach to the Father. And this ſhews how fooliſhly Men charge God, when they complain of the heavy Impoſition laid upon their Faith and their Underſtanding by the Goſpel Doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit, God has revealed this for our Sakes only, not for Matter of Speculation, or for the enlarging of our Knowledge; but that, having a reaſonable Ground of Aſſurance and Hope in him, we may, through Faith, and patient Abiding, inherit the Promiſes.

You ſee now what every Chriſtian has to expect and hope for from the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit, and Interceſſion of the Son of God. We all were Strangers to God, and Children of Diſobedience; we are now reconciled to God, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having thus Acceſs to the Father, our All depends on the Uſe we make of this great Privilege. By having Acceſs to God, we are not placed in a State of Security, but in a State of Probation: We are received as prodigal Sons come home; if we continue obedient, we may hope for the Inheritance; but, if we turn Prodigals again, our Caſe will be deſperate. This is the Condition of Chriſtians. The Scripture has told us what our preſent State is; but, as to our future State, that depends upon our obeying, or not obeying, the Commands of God. And thoſe who look for further Security, and expect to be aſcertained what their future State will be, do very much impoſe upon themſelves; and aſcribe to the Holy Spirit an Office, of which the Scripture knows nothing. God has done, and will do, great Things for you; let not this make you vain and preſumptuous, but let it excite your Care, that the

Gift

Gift of God may not be beſtowed on you in vain; and always bear in Mind the Apoſtle's Advice, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Some imagine, that God's working with us is a Reaſon why we ſhould be confident and ſecure of our Salvation: But you ſee St. *Paul* was of another Mind. He writes to thoſe who certainly had the Spirit; for he tells them, that God did work in them both to will and to do: But does he tell them that they were ſafe and ſecure, and out of all Danger? No, he ſays nothing like it; on the contrary, he calls upon them to fear and tremble, leſt, having received ſo great Gift, they ſhould by their Negligence, as thinking themſelves ſecure, forfeit all the Hopes of the Goſpel.

God ſays, with reſpect to the old World, *My Spirit ſhall not always ſtrive with Man:* The Caſe is the ſame under the Goſpel. The Spirit of God works with us, but will not always ſtrive with us; and therefore, whilſt we may have the Help of God's Spirit, we muſt lay hold of the Opportunity, and work with him. And whoever

ever conſiders this, will find he has great Reaſon to tremble and fear; for, if he loſes the Opportunity of making the beſt Uſe of the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit when it is offered, he may loſe the Spirit, and himſelf, for ever. Let us therefore work whilſt we have the Light, and continually pray in the Words of our Church, *O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us.*

DISCOURSE III.

EPHESIANS ii. 8.

For by Grace are ye ſaved, through Faith; and that not of yourſelves: It is the Gift of God.

WE have here, in few Words, the Argument which St. *Paul* always inſiſts on, when he has occaſion to ſet forth the Kindneſs of God towards Mankind. Life and Immortality are the greateſt Bleſſings that we have any Notion of; and theſe were brought to light by the Goſpel of Chriſt: Him God gave for a Redeemer to the World, *that whoſoever believeth on him ſhould not die, but have eternal Life.* And even that through Faith in him we are ſaved, is the Gift of God, for of ourſelves we are able to do nothing. Theſe Things

Things are taught us in the Compaſs of the Text, *We are ſaved by Grace:* We had no Title or Claim to Salvation, but God of his own Good-will hath ſent among us plenteous Redemption; and according to the Richneſs of his Mercy, and the great Love wherewith he loved us, hath, together with Chriſt, quickened us who were dead in Sins. The Condition of this Salvation on our part is Faith; for we are ſaved by Grace *through Faith.* We muſt believe our Redeemer, that he cometh from God, and hath the Words of Life; and muſt rely on him to perform the Word of Salvation which is gone out of his Mouth. But neither upon the Performance of this Condition can we ſay that our own Arm hath ſaved us, or that we have done any Thing towards perfecting our Redemption; for this Salvation through Faith, and this Faith, is *not of ourſelves, it is the Gift of God.*

I ſhall diſcourſe on this Propoſition, That Faith is the Gift of God: Firſt, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew what the Scripture Doctrine on this Head is; and, Secondly, ſhall ſuggeſt to you ſome Conſiderations proper to this Subject.

Firſt, then, Let us conſider what the Scripture Doctrine on this Head is. The Faith which St. *Paul* ſpeaks of in the Text is ſuch a Faith as is effectual to Salvation, for it is the Faith through which, by Grace, we are ſaved: This Faith he aſſerts to be the Gift of God. There are different Significations of the Word *Faith* in Scripture: Sometimes it ſignifies barely an Aſſent of the Mind to the Revelations and Doctrines of the Goſpel, grounded upon ſuch Evidence as the Things were capable of: this Faith ſometimes is merely the Effect of common Senſe; for Men cannot help believing the Things they ſee: Sometimes this Faith is grounded on the neceſſary Deductions of Reaſon from common Principles: by this means we arrive at the Knowledge of God; a Man of Reaſon can no more avoid believing the Exiſtence of a Firſt Cauſe, than a Man with Eyes can avoid thinking that there is a material World, in which he lives: But neither has this Aſſent of the Mind the true Nature of Faith in it; *Thou believeſt*, ſaith St. *James*, *that there is one God; thou doeſt well: the Devils alſo believe, and tremble:* But neither of theſe Kinds of Faith being the

the Faith through which we are ſaved, you cannot ſay, that St. *Paul* aſſerts of theſe, that they are the Gift of God; any farther than as Senſe and Reaſon are his Gifts, by which we know theſe and all other Things: Nor do we teach that Nature and Reaſon cannot lead to the ſpeculative Knowledge of divine Truths; for the Evidence of all divine Truth reſolves itſelf ultimately into either Senſe or Reaſon; which are the common Gifts of God to Mankind, by the Principles of which the Truth of all Things, depending upon the Deductions of Senſe and Reaſon, may be proved and examined. From the Exerciſe of Reaſon we come to know God, and the eſſential Difference between Good and Evil; and by theſe Principles are enabled to judge of any Doctrine whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy Nature of God; which is the firſt preſumptive Argument for the Truth of any divine Revelation; that it is holy and pure, and ſuch an one, as, were God to have given a Law to the World, he would have given: From Reaſon we learn the unlimited Power of God; and from Senſe and Reaſon we know the limited Power of Man; and are enabled to diſtin-

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guiſh between the Works which the Power or Policy of Man can perform, and the Works which can flow only from the unbounded Power of God: From hence we can judge of the poſitive Arguments of a divine Revelation, the Works and Miracles which are offered to the World in Confirmation of its Truth. Thus far the natural Gifts of Senſe and Reaſon can carry us; but the Reſult is barely the Aſſent or Diſſent of the Mind to the Things under Enquiry; which Aſſent alone is not the Faith through which we are ſaved.

But let it be obſerved, as to theſe firſt Rudiments of Faith, That though Reaſon and Knowledge may attain to them, yet the Exerciſe of Reaſon and Knowledge depends upon the Will and Inclination; which are not naturally much given to dwell upon the Subject of Religion, but are engaged in the Affairs and Concerns of the World, and taken up in the Purſuit of preſent Pleaſures and Enjoyments: That, were Men left to themſelves, but few would arrive even to this Degree of Faith; not for want of Underſtanding to diſcern, but for want of Will to enquire after, the Things which make for their Salvation. Thus, at the firſt

Preaching

Preaching of the Goſpel, all the worldly-minded Men, and generally all the great Men, were profeſſed Enemies to our Saviour: No ſooner did he appear to preach a new Doctrine, but they oppoſed him: Not that they had Time or Opportunity to examine his Pretenſions; but this Preſumption, that his Doctrine would thwart their Intereſt, and leſſen their Power and Authority among the People, prevailed with them to endeavour to ſtifle and ſuppreſs this new Doctrine before it ſpread to their Prejudice: In which they were evidently guided, not by Senſe or Reaſon, but by a perverſe Will and evil Diſpoſition. And ſince Men cannot but know, from their natural Notions of Good and Evil, that any Revelation coming from a pure and holy God muſt croſs their evil Deſigns and Affections, they cannot but lie under a great Indiſpoſition to enquire after divine Truths, in which, as long as Luſt and Paſſion have the Dominion over them, they can promiſe themſelves but little Comfort or Satisfaction: So that, to enable Men fairly to examine the Truth of a divine Revelation, and to acknowledge it upon full and ſufficient Evidence, there muſt be ſuch a Diſpoſition of Mind to receive whatever

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may appear to be the Will of God, as may enable you to be impartial Judges. This our Saviour requires of us, when he ſays, *If any Man will do the Will of God, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf*: that is, If any Man has ſo far got the Victory over his own Paſſions and Luſts, as to be ready to give himſelf to the Direction of God's Will, whenever it may be made appear to him; this Man is in a right Diſpoſition to receive the Truths of the Goſpel, and to judge whether Chriſt be indeed the Prophet of the Moſt High. Now this Diſpoſition is far from being natural to Man, according to the Nature Man has at preſent; and therefore thus to prepare and diſpoſe Mens Minds to receive the Goſpel, is the Work of the Spirit, and is aſcribed to him conſtantly in Scripture, where there is Occaſion to ſpeak of it: *No Man*, ſays our Lord, *can come unto me, except the Father which hath ſent me draw him*: And again, *No Man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*; that is, Unleſs the Father, by the Grace of his Spirit, inclines and diſpoſes his Will to attend to the Words of Life which I

deliver. To the ſame Purpoſe he ſpeaks in another Place, *He that is of God, heareth God's Word*; where, to be of God, is no more than to be of the Number of thoſe who are diſpoſed to obey God; for, if to be of God ſignifies any Thing more, it will hardly leave any tolerable Senſe for the Word: Our Saviour would not ſay, Thoſe who obey God will hear God's Word; which is ſaying, Thoſe who obey God, will obey God: And therefore, to be of God, muſt ſignify no more than to be ready and diſpoſed to receive the Will of God, by the Influence of his Grace. To be of God, and to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do the Will of God, are manifeſtly put to ſignify the ſame Thing, becauſe the ſame Thing is affirmed of them: Our Saviour ſays, *No Man can come unto him, unleſs he be drawn of God*; and yet he ſays, *He that is of God will hear his Word*; and, in another Place, *If any Man is willing to do the Will of God, he ſhall know of his Doctrine*; and, if ſo, then to be willing to do the Will of God, muſt amount to the ſame Thing with being of God, and being drawn by God. From whence it follows, that thoſe who are willing to do his

his Will, that is, diſpoſed to receive his Truth, are drawn by him: that is, All who are well diſpoſed to receive the Faith of Chriſt, owe their Diſpoſition to the Grace and Influence of God's Holy Spirit. Accordingly, we read of *Lydia*, that *God opened her Heart to attend unto the Things which were ſpoken of Paul*; where, opening her Heart, can ſignify nothing but inclining her Will to attend to, and examine, the Truths of the Goſpel, which were the Things ſpoken by *Paul*. And, as Faith is aſcribed to this Diſpoſition wrought by the Spirit of God, ſo the Want of Faith is aſcribed to the contrary Diſpoſition, where a Man is under the Power of Luſt and Appetite, and poſſeſſed with the Love of this World and the Pleaſures of it: *If our Goſpel be hid*, ſays St. *Paul*, *it is hid to them that are loſt: In whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, leſt the Light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the Image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them.*

But, ſecondly, Faith ſignifies likewiſe Truſt and Reliance on God; and includes a confident Hope and Expectation, that God will perform his Promiſes made to us in

his Son. It is described as an active Principle of Religion, influencing the Mind to Obedience to the Law of God. This is the Faith through which *we are saved*, and is affirmed by St. *Paul* to be *the Gift of God*; To this Faith we owe our Growth and Progress in all Kinds of Christian Graces and Virtues; this is the Foundation of them, and this it is that makes them acceptable to God, That they are done in Faith. That Faith is perfect which is attended with a good Conscience, *void of Offence towards God and towards Man.* These two St. *Paul* couples together in his Advice to *Timothy*, enjoining him *to hold the Faith and a good Conscience; which some having put away, concerning Faith have made Shipwreck:* So that Faith cannot stand without a good Conscience; that is, it is no Faith which does not *purge the Conscience from dead Works*, and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God.* Now all that Reason can do, is to assent or dissent to any Doctrine; but Obedience must come from the Will. Wicked Men often believe; but, like the Devils, they tremble at the Majesty of God, and do not love or delight in him, or seek to do his Will. Faith then is made up of

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the Concurrence of the Will and the Underſtanding. The Underſtanding is ſtill the Rule to judge Truth by; but the Will is not the right Rule of Action, and therefore the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit, to induce the Will to follow the Underſtanding, is neceſſary in the perfect Work of Faith: And this Work is aſcribed to the Spirit in Scripture. Our Saviour, ſpeaking to his Diſciples, tells them, *I am the Vine, ye are the Branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much Fruit, for without me ye can do nothing.* Chriſt abideth in his Members by his Holy Spirit; and therefore we are told, *that our Bodies are the Temples of the Holy Ghoſt.* So then our Saviour's Doctrine is, That without the Aſſiſtance of his Spirit we can do nothing, but with it we may bring forth Fruit. To bring forth Fruit, in the Phraſe of Scripture, is to be obedient to the Laws of God, and to be employed in the Works of Righteouſneſs: So that Faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing Principle of our Lives, without the Aſſiſtance of the Spirit, to ſubdue our Wills to the Law of Holineſs. Faith in this Senſe is reckoned among the Fruits of the Spirit,

both in the Epiſtle to the *Galatians*, and in that to the *Corinthians*: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-ſuffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith:* So in the Epiſtle to the *Philippians*, the Apoſtle tells them, *It is given unto them in the behalf of Chriſt, not only to believe on him, but alſo to ſuffer for his Sake:* Where the Apoſtle's Doctrine is manifeſtly this; That both to believe in Chriſt, and to ſuffer for Chriſt, are the Gifts of God through his Holy Spirit. I ſhall not multiply Quotations upon this Head, which lye ready to any diligent Enquirer's Search; but ſhall ſpend the Time that remains in ſuggeſting to you ſome proper Obſervations on this Subject.

And, Firſt, Our aſcribing Faith to the Operation of the Spirit, does not make our Faith ceaſe to be a reaſonable Act of the Mind: And yet this Surmiſe is apt to affect Men; and they think it is for want of Reaſon to prove our Religion, that we require the Gift of Faith to make it go down. But the Caſe is far otherwiſe: The Apoſtle adviſes us, *always to be ready to give to every one that aſketh it of us a Reaſon of the Faith that is in us*; conſequently, Reaſon and Faith, or Reaſon

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and the Gift of the Spirit, are conſiſtent; or elſe it would not be poſſible for thoſe who receive Faith by the Spirit, to give a Reaſon of the Faith that is in them. Beſides, a Revelation ſufficiently atteſted, that is, ſufficiently proved to Reaſon, is preſuppoſed to the Work of Faith; for the Gift of Faith adminiſters no new Arguments for Religion: And therefore, if it be not a reaſonable Religion before we have Faith, it cannot be ſo afterwards. The firſt Work of Faith upon the Minds of Men, as I proved by Compariſon of ſeveral Parts of Scripture, is to diſpoſe them to liſten after and obey the *Will of God*. *Lydia*'s Heart was opened by Grace; this did not make her, right or wrong, take up with the Apoſtle's Doctrine, but it is ſaid, that *ſhe attended to the Words that were ſpoken by Paul*. Now, the more you attend to a Thing that has no Reaſon in it, the leſs you will like it: Let the Spirit therefore ſupply the Grace of Attention in the greateſt Meaſure; if there wants Reaſon or Evidence in the Things we attend to, Attention will ſerve no other Purpoſe than to ſhew us theſe Defects; So that this Gift of the Spirit neither influences the Reaſon of Man, nor the Rea-

ſon of the Thing; conſequently, this Gift of the Spirit is no ways inconſiſtent with Reaſon. So neither is that other Gift of the Spirit, by which we are diſpoſed to a Readineſs to obey the Will of God; for my being ready to obey the Will of God cannot make a Doctrine to be the Will of God, which is not the Will of God; or make me ſee Arguments to prove a Doctrine where there are none: Conſequently, let a Man be ever ſo ready to obey the Will of God, it cannot affect his Judgment in diſcerning what is the Will of God, or diſturb the Exerciſe of Reaſon in ſearching for the Doctrine which does contain the Will of God. And therefore this Gift of the Spirit likewiſe leaves a Man free to examine the Proofs of Religion, and does not influence his Mind one Way or other in judging the Truth: For a Man who is willing to do the Will of God muſt neceſſarily be very unwilling to do what is not his Will; and therefore will be very loath to take up with any Doctrine for the Will of God, which is not ſufficiently proved to be ſo. This Grace therefore only puts him upon ſearching and examining the Pretences of Religion, upon the Exerciſe of Reaſon,

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to diſcern where Truth lies? And this, I ſuppoſe, will be allowed to be the moſt reaſonable Thing a Man can do. Thus, you ſee, the Aſſent of the Mind to the Truth of Religion is an Act of Reaſon, and muſt be ſo notwithſtanding the Gifts and Aſſiſtances of the Spirit. And as Reaſon is not diſturbed by the Gifts of the Spirit which are previous to the Aſſent of the Mind; ſo, I hope, it will not be thought it can be influenced by thoſe that are conſequent to it. Faith is not perfected but through Obedience. The Power to obey and to love God we aſcribe to the Spirit. Now, you cannot obey God till you know what is the Will of God; therefore you muſt firſt judge of Religion, before this Gift can operate: And therefore this Gift cannot affect your Reaſon one Way or other. After you have proved and conſented to the Truth of the Goſpel, it is highly reaſonable you ſhould obey it. But though Reaſon, upon due Application, can diſcern the Truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt Will: And therefore it is one Thing to judge with Reaſon, another Thing to act with Reaſon: And the Grace of Obedience

bedience is given us by the Spirit, that we may not only think, but act, like reaſonable Creatures.

I do not remember that God ever promiſed to force or ſubdue our Reaſon to the Belief of the Goſpel by his Spirit: If he had taken this Method, he might have ſaved the Trouble of working Signs and Wonders and Miracles, and all other Arguments might have been ſpared, which are only Appeals to Reaſon, and would have been needleſs, had the Spirit been given to particular Perſons for the Conviction of their Minds. The Apoſtle often prays, in behalf of his Converts, *that God would enlighten their Minds and Underſtandings; that he would increaſe their Knowledge; that he would give them a right Judgment in all Things.* But I think it will be agreed, that the more enlightened a Man's Mind is, the larger the Compaſs of Knowledge and Underſtanding, and the better his Judgment is, the more acute he will be in diſtinguiſhing Truth from Falſhood; conſequently, the better able to judge of Religion, and the leſs ready to receive it, without ſufficient Evidence, that is, without Reaſon.

In the ſecond Chapter of the firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, St. *Paul* treats of the Method by which we arrive to the Knowledge of ſpiritual Truths: *They are*, he ſays, *ſpiritually diſcerned; and the natural Man cannot receive them, they are Fooliſhneſs to him*; and, upon this Authority, even the Uſe of Reaſon has been rejected in Enquiries of Religion, and Men ſent to the Spirit for Proof. But what the Apoſtle ſays here will be found conſiſtent with what has been already ſaid upon this Head. In the third Verſe he tells the *Corinthians*, that *his Preaching was not with the enticing Words of Man's Wiſdom, but in the Demonſtration of the Spirit and of Power*; that is, He did not preach from natural Topicks, but preached the Things which the Spirit had revealed to him; and gave the Works of the Spirit, that is, Signs and Miracles, for Proof of his Doctrine. But this was a reaſonable Proof ſtill, and ſuch an one as Reaſon could judge of. Verſe the fourteenth he ſays, *The natural Man cannot receive the Things of the Spirit of God*: Which is very true; for how ſhould natural Reaſon furniſh Arguments to prove the Revelations of God, which have no Connexion with natural Principles of Reaſon?

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But then he adds, *Theſe Things are ſpiritually diſcerned*; or, as he words it in the eighteenth Verſe, *they are diſcerned by comparing ſpiritual Things with ſpiritual*; that is, By comparing the Proofs of the Spirit and the Revelations of the Spirit together. This Compariſon is the Work of Reaſon; for Reaſon diſcerns the Agreement between theſe ſpiritual Things, and, by conſidering the Works and Wonders of the Spirit, ſubmits to the Revelations of the Spirit. So what the Apoſtle affirms here is only this, That the Revelations of God are not to be examined or known by Principles or Proofs of natural Reaſon, but muſt be manifeſted by the Proofs of the Spirit; for we have no Proofs from Reaſon for the Revelations of the Goſpel, but we have the Works of the Spirit, by which they are atteſted. And here it is plain what the Work of the Spirit is: It brings Proofs to the Reaſon of Man, but does not bring the Reaſon of Man to the Proofs: So that Reaſon and Faith, or Reaſon and the Gift of the Spirit, are conſiſtent.

Secondly, As to the Meaſure in which the Spirit is given, the Scripture is not expreſs: This we are ſure of, that all to whom

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the Spirit is given do not obey the Spirit; for we read of ſome who *reſiſt the Spirit of God*, who do *deſpite to the Holy Spirit*. From whence it is evident, that all who are loſt, are not loſt for want of due Aſſiſtance from God; ſince they had the Offer of the Spirit, but refuſed and withſtood his holy Motions. God has engaged in Chriſt to give us all Things neceſſary to our Salvation; and therefore, as far as the Spirit is neceſſary, ſo far we are ſure of his Aſſiſtance. As Men improve in Virtue and Holineſs they contract a greater Familiarity with the Holy Spirit: with ſuch he is ſaid *to dwell, to abide with them*. Which anſwers to what our Saviour ſays, *To him that hath, it ſhall be given, and from him that hath not, even that which he hath ſhall be taken away*. The plain Conſequence of which is, that we ſhould, according to the Apoſtle's Advice, *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good Pleaſure*. If therefore we ceaſe to work whilſt we have Time and Opportunity, God will withdraw his Grace from us, *even that which we have, ſhall be taken from us*. We cannot

cannot work without God; Therefore ſhould we work with Fear and Trembling, leſt, if we neglect the appointed Time, we ſhould be left deſtitute of Help, without Hope or Remedy.

Laſtly, We may collect what are the Signs and Marks of Grace in the Regenerate; even this, That we keep the Will of God. I. before obſerved, that to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do his Will, are one and the ſame Thing: If ſo, then all who do the Will of God, are drawn of God; and all who are effectually drawn of God, do his Will. From whence it follows, that all who live virtuouſly and holily have the Spirit of God; and all who do wickedly are of their Father the Devil. From whence it follows, that it is a vain and ill-grounded Confidence that ſome Men have in their ſpiritual Attainments, whilſt they work the Works of Darkneſs: For he only that doth the Works of the Spirit, hath the Spirit of God, *and hereby do we know that we love him, if we keep his Commandments.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE IV.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling. For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good Pleasure.

THERE have not, perhaps, been any more unhappy Disputes in the Christian Church, than those relating to the natural Powers of Man to work out his own Salvation, and those relating to the Nature and Measure of the Grace and Assistance promised in the Gospel of Christ. On one Side, it is insisted, that Virtue and Vice owe their Being to the Freedom and Choice of the Agent, and lose their Name when they are the Effect of Force and Constraint:

Conſtraint; and, conſequently, that to ſuppoſe Men to be made righteous by any Influence from any other Being than themſelves, is contrary to Reaſon. And hence it is that ſome of the Advocates for mere human Reaſon, as ſufficient to all the Purpoſes of Salvation, deſpiſe the Promiſes, made in the Goſpel, of Grace and ſpiritual Aſſiſtance; and others of them ſo explain them, as to leave them no Meaning at all. On the other Side, ſome zealous Aſſerters of the Doctrine of Grace, in order to magnify this free Gift of God, allow nothing to Reaſon or the natural Powers of Men; but think it the higheſt Preſumption and the greateſt Affront offered to the Grace of God, to ſuppoſe that Men can do any Thing for themſelves. It is, in their own way of Expreſſion, to make the Power of God attendant on the Weakneſs of Man, and to make the Grace of God the Servant and Handmaid of human Reaſon. And thus it is agreed on both Sides, by thoſe who carry their reſpective Opinions to the greateſt Length, that either the Power of Man to work Righteouſneſs muſt exclude the Grace of God, or the

Grace of God muſt exclude all the Effects and Endeavours of human Reaſon.

But as inconſiſtent as they may think theſe Things to be, St. *Paul*, who was better inſtructed in the Principles of the Goſpel of Chriſt than the antient or the modern Teachers of theſe Doctrines can pretend to be, has thought fit to join them together, and has called upon all Chriſtians *to work out their own Salvation*, for this very Reaſon, becauſe *God works in them both to will and to do*. If St. *Paul* be in the right, God's working with us by his Grace is ſo far from being a Reaſon againſt working for ourſelves, that it is the greateſt Inducement to it, and lays us under the higheſt Obligation to *give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure*.

Let us then conſider St. *Paul*'s Doctrine, and ſee what are the natural Conſequences for a Chriſtian to draw from it.

The Words of the Text evidently conſiſt of two Parts, an Exhortation, and an Argument by which that Exhortation is enforced. The Exhortation you have in theſe Words, *Work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling*: The Argument to enforce it follows in the next

Words, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good Pleaſure.* An Argument which may at firſt Sight ſeem rather to lead to Confidence and Aſſurance, than to Fear and Trembling: For if God be for us, who can be againſt us? or what is there to fear, or to tremble at, when we are thus ſupported and maintained in our ſpiritual Warfare? And the Argument is indeed applicable both Ways, with reſpect to different kinds of Fear. The Diſciples of the Goſpel have many Enemies to encounter with, many Temptations to ſtruggle with; they are expoſed ſometimes to Death, often to Afflictions and Perſecutions, and almoſt always to the Hatred and Contempt of the World. Now with reſpect to theſe Adverſaries, the Argument in the Text may furniſh us with great Confidence and Aſſurance, and we may with the Apoſtle ſay, *Who ſhall harm you, if you be Followers of that which is good?* for, notwithſtanding all the Trials you are expoſed to, *God is able to keep you from falling, and to preſent you faultleſs before the Preſence of his Glory with exceeding Joy.* But as there is a Fear which reſpects our Enemies,

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and is a Fear of being conquered and brought into Subjection by them; ſo likewiſe is there a Fear which reſpects our Friends, and is a Fear of loſing their Favour and Aſſiſtance; and the more a Man is dependent upon his Friends, the greater is, and ought to be, his Fear of loſing their Protection: And this Fear naturally inſpires us with Diligence and Care to obſerve and fulfil the Commands of our great Patrons, to ſtudy their Humour and Inclination, and to conform ourſelves to them. And of this Fear the Apoſtle ſpeaks in the Text, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; for it is a Work that you are by no Means ſufficient for of yourſelves; and therefore have a Care how you forfeit the Favour of him upon whom you entirely depend: *Of yourſelves ye can do nothing; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.* That St. *Paul* intends this Sort and Kind of Fear, may be ſeen by his own way of Reaſoning. In the Beginning of this Chapter, he preſſes Humility upon the *Philippians*, he warns them againſt Striſe and vain Glory, and, after ſome Arguments, drawn from the Example of Chriſt

and the great Reward he obtained, to recommend Humility to them, as if Humility and Fear, in the preſent Caſe, were the ſame Thing, he thus concludes, *Wherefore, my Beloved, work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* If we believe that God works in us both to will and to do, it will make us humble, becauſe we can do nothing without him; for in ſuch a Caſe what have we to be proud of? Weakneſs and a State of Dependence are inconſiſtent with Confidence and Preſumption: It will make us likewiſe fear and tremble, fear to diſpleaſe, and tremble to diſobey, him from whom cometh our Salvation.

That this Fear is the Fear of offending God, and loſing his Favour, is further evident from the next Verſe, *Do all Things without Murmurings and Diſputings.* Now what Fear is it that makes Men obey chearfully without repining, without ſeeking for Excuſes to free themſelves? Not the Fear of Puniſhment; for who grumble more than Slaves? who repine more at their Service, or more readily ſeek and invent Pretences to decline the Orders of their Maſter? But where the Fear that poſſeſſes

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the Heart is the Fear of disobliging a kind Friend, or a beloved Master, or a Patron upon whom we depend, there Fear gives Wings to Obedience, and makes a Man all Ear and no Tongue, ready to receive but not dispute the Command. The following Verse supplies us with the like Argument: The Words are these, *That ye may be blameless, and harmless*, or, as the Margin reads it, *sincere, the Sons of God, without Rebuke*. Now then the Fear the Apostle speaks of is the Fear of a Son, the Fear of offending the Father he loves; it is a Fear which makes Obedience blameless, and sincere, and without Rebuke; which no Fear can do, but a Fear of offending him we love, and him we depend on. Other Fears may make the Hands or the Feet obedient; but this Fear only reaches the Heart, and renders Obedience perfect and sincere.

The Christian Law indeed, like all other wise Laws, is fortified with Rewards and Punishments; and these Rewards and Punishments God has proposed to us as Motives of Obedience, of that Obedience which he has promised to accept and reward: And therefore there is no Doubt

but that thoſe who obey upon theſe Motives, ſhall for their Obedience be rewarded.

But this Fear cannot here be meant; For, firſt, it will not agree with the Apoſtle's Argument for fearing: For ſurely it is no Reaſon to fear Puniſhment, that God works in us to will and to do; we ſhould have much more Reaſon to fear it if he did not: And this Help and Aſſiſtance of God is our greateſt Comfort and Conſolation againſt ſuch Fears. Secondly, *To work out his Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, is the Duty of every good Chriſtian. Now to fear Puniſhment is a proper Reſtraint upon the evil Wills and Affections of Men, but it is no good Man's Duty; and yet to ſuch the Apoſtle ſpeaks, as we may ſee in the Verſe of the Text, *Ye have always obeyed, not as in my Preſence only, but now much more in my Abſence*; and by the Character he gives them in the ſeventh Verſe of the firſt Chapter, *Both in my Bonds, and in the Defence and Confirmation of the Goſpel, ye all are Partakers of my Grace.* Now to theſe good Chriſtians he ſays, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling:* This he enjoins

joins them as a Thing, not only highly becoming their Condition, but as neceſſary to it. But the Fear of Puniſhment can never be neceſſary to any good Man's Condition, nor can it ever be made Matter of Precept or Command. For the Law is not made to inſtill the Fear of Puniſhment into Mens Hearts; nor is it the Deſign of the Lawgiver to ſpread Fear and Terror into the Minds of his People: Penalties are added to enforce Obedience, and therefore concern not thoſe who are ready and willing to obey. It may be Matter of wiſe Admonition to Chriſtians to ſet before them the Danger of Diſobedience, and to exhort them, with our Bleſſed Lord, To *fear not thoſe who can only kill the Body, but after that can do nothing; but to fear him who has Power both over Body and Soul, and can throw them both into Hell Fire:* But when do you ever find it enjoined, as Matter of Duty, to be afraid of Hell? Is it any Part of the good Subject's Obedience to live in perpetual Apprehenſion of Racks and Gibbets, becauſe Racks and Gibbets are provided for Murderers and Robbers? *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the Power?* ſays our Apoſtle,

ſtle, *do that which is good.* So that to fear the Power, belongs not to him who does good. God has commanded all Men to live righteouſly, and threatened ſevere Puniſhment to thoſe who live otherwiſe; but he has no where commanded all Men to live in Fear of Puniſhment: But the Exhortation in the Text belongs to all Men, it belongs to the moſt perfect Chriſtians; and therefore the Fear in the Text is not the Fear of Puniſhment, which can neither be Matter of Command, or Exhortation, to thoſe who do not want it, that is, to all good Chriſtians, who from the Heart obey the Truth. And this may ſerve to diſtinguiſh the Fear and Trembling mentioned in the Text, from the Fear which belongs to Criminals and Slaves; which Fear, the Apoſtle tells us, *perfect Love caſteth out.*

But ſince there is a Fear and Trembling neceſſary to the working out of our Salvation, and which muſt, and ought to rule the Affections of the beſt of Men, let us conſider more diſtinctly the Nature of this Fear. Now the Reaſon why we ought to fear, is becauſe *God worketh in us, both to will and to do:* Let us examine then how far this Argument goes, and that will

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ſhew us the Nature of that Fear which is the Conſequence of it. To will and to do Good, are the Terms and Conditions of our Salvation; and therefore, from whence we have the Power to will and to do, from thence we have the Means of Salvation. Now Salvation comprehends in it all the Good we are capable of enjoying, without which our Life is Death, and our Hope, Miſery: So that, if we depend upon God to work in us both to will and to do, we depend upon him for all that is, or can be, valuable to Man. And farther, *God worketh in us, of his own good Pleaſure*: We have no Right or Claim to his Aſſiſtance; freely he gave, and freely he may take away, whenever he pleaſes. Now conſider yourſelf in this State of Dependence, and ſee what it is you have to fear. All your Danger is in loſing the Favour of God; and therefore for that too muſt be all your Fear. Now this Fear has more of Care and Sollicitude in it, than of Terror or Amazement: For it is one Thing to be afraid of a Man, leſt he ſhould hurt you, and another Thing to be afraid of loſing his Favour: The firſt Fear is Terror, the laſt is Carefulneſs. So

that

that the Text is parallel to that Paſſage in St. *Peter*, *Give Diligence to make your Calling and Election ſure.* St. *Peter*, you ſee, ſpeaks directly of the Call and Election of Chriſtians; but ſo far was he from thinking this Call and this Election to be abſolute, that he adviſes thoſe who have the Call and Election, to give all Diligence to make them ſure; plainly teaching us, that though God has called and elected us in Chriſt, yet it depends on our own Care to make them effectual to Salvation. It is one certain Way to forfeit the Gifts of God, not to make uſe of them; for why ſhould he beſtow his Gifts in vain? And therefore it is a great Argument for Diligence and Application, that we depend not upon our own Strength, but the Aſſiſtance and Power of God. As for Things which are intirely in our own Power, it may poſſibly be more for our Convenience, and as well for our Buſineſs, to do them to-morrow as to-day: But no Man will run this Hazard when the Thing is in his Power to-day, but may be out of his Power to-morrow. And this is an Argument for immediate Care and Induſtry: God worketh in us when he thinks fit; and therefore

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when he thinks fit you muſt work too; for his Grace will not wait upon your Humour, and be ready at your Beck: And ſhould you neglect the preſent Opportunity, it may be your laſt; ſince you have no Security but from his Good-will and Pleaſure; and to play with his Offers, and neglect his Call, is not the Way to obtain them. There is no conſtant Care without conſtant Fear. A Man will not be careful to perform what he is not afraid to loſe; and therefore, in this Caſe, that which is an Argument for Care, is an Argument for Fear likewiſe.

But, farther, this Fear ariſes from a Senſe of our own Inſufficiency, and our Dependence upon God: But our Inſufficiency is no Reaſon why we ſhould be afraid of God. Becauſe I cannot help myſelf, it is no Argument that I muſt be afraid of him that can: And ſince God does help our Weakneſs, it is great Reaſon we ſhould love and adore him, but not that we ſhould dread and fear him. So that the Fear that ariſes from hence, is not in the leaſt Degree inconſiſtent with the perfect Love of God. For the ſame Reaſon, that we ought to fear mightily, we ought to love entirely,

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becauſe *God worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good Pleaſure.* That it is of his good Pleaſure that he aſſiſts us, is a great Evidence of his Love to us, and a great Argument for our Love to him. Since then the Cauſe of this Fear is in ourſelves, for it ariſes from our own Weakneſs and Inability; we ourſelves, properly ſpeaking, are the only Objects of this Fear. We cannot be afraid of God, becauſe he loves us and helps us; but we may well be afraid of ourſelves, leſt, being weak and fooliſh, as we are, we ſhould not uſe, as we ought to uſe, the manifold Gifts and Graces of God. Now then we are come to that which is indeed the good Chriſtian's Fear, his conſtant Fear; and that is, the Fear of himſelf: *Let him that ſtandeth*, ſays the Apoſtle, *take heed leſt he fall.* There is no Man ſo perfect, but that he ought to carry this Fear about him; and where his Fear points, there muſt his Care and Diligence be applied, that is, to himſelf ſtill: He muſt watch his Paſſions and Affections, leſt any of them break out into open Enmity againſt God: His rebel Heart muſt be guarded, leſt it quench the holy Flame which God has kindled in it,

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leſt it do Deſpight to the Spirit of God, which comes to dwell and inhabit in it. And this is a juſt and an holy Fear, a Fear which is not injurious to the Love of God towards us; which carries in it no ſecret Miſtruſt of his Kindneſs or Affection, nor is any Blemiſh to our Faith or Hope in him: Nay, it is a Security to them all; it preſerves the Love of God towards us, as it keeps us from thoſe Offences which would alienate his Love from us; it preſerves our Faith and Hope, by preſerving us from thoſe Sins which would deſtroy them, which would render our Condition hopeleſs, and our Faith vain. So likewiſe are the Care and Diligence, which proceed from this Fear, free from any Imputations of Arrogance or Preſumption. We ſet not up for ourſelves, as if our own Arm could ſave us; but for this very Reaſon we are careful and diligent, becauſe of ourſelves we can do nothing: And therefore are we zealous and careful to make uſe of thoſe Powers which God beſtows on us. We are always working, but not our own Works; but we ſtrive to *abound in the Work of the Lord*, as St. *Paul* expreſſes it: We hope to be rewarded for our

our Labour, and yet not for our own, but, as the ſame Apoſtle aſſures us, *we know that our Labour in the Lord is not in vain.* If we hope, we hope in the Lord; if we fear, we fear ourſelves. *Perfect Love*, ſays St. *John*, *caſteth out Fear*, that is, the Fear of him whom we love. Nor is this Fear thus to be caſt out the Fear of God, for he is on our Side: but a Man's worſt Enemies are they of his own Houſhold; and therefore we juſtly fear our own Hearts and Affections, and over them is all our Care, *that we may keep ourſelves unſpotted from the World.*

From this Account of the Nature of holy Fear, it will be eaſy to explain what it is to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* God has given us many Laws and Commands, in Obedience to which conſiſteth our Salvation. He has promiſed us ſuch Degrees of Aſſiſtance as ſhall enable us to perform the Conditions required of us. To do the Will of God, to walk in his Laws, is to *work out our Salvation.* This to do, under the Aſſiſtance which God has given us, depends upon ourſelves: We can miſcarry in no Point, but in this which is left to ourſelves. Here then all our Diligence and Care is neceſſary.

neceſſary. We are prone to Evil and Miſchief, and it requires our conſtant Application to ſecure ourſelves from falling under the Dominion of Luſt and Wickedneſs; and therefore we muſt walk circumſpectly, watching and obſerving ourſelves; we muſt be jealous over our own Hearts, for out of them *are the Springs of Life*, as the Wiſe Man tells us. This makes the Chriſtian State to be a ſpiritual Warfare; a State of continual Care and Watchfulneſs, of Fear and Suſpicion: So that it is no leſs than conſtant Employment for a Man, to walk uprightly with his God. This conſtant Care can come from nothing, but a Perſuaſion that it is neceſſary in our Condition; and he that is well convinced of his own Weakneſs will be perpetually afraid of miſcarrying; which Fear will keep his Diligence awake: So that *to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, is, with the utmoſt Care and Diligence to ſet ourſelves to perform the Will and Commands of God, to be diligent *to make our Calling and Election ſure*.

There is, in the Language made uſe of to explain the Doctrine of Grace, ſomething liable to be abuſed by ignorant or crafty

crafty Men. We ſay, that of ourſelves we can do nothing; whence they conclude, that we have nothing to do. We ſay, that it is the Grace of God which enables us to do every Thing; from whence they conclude, that every Thing muſt be left to the Grace of God, and that we need only work ourſelves into a ſtrong Perſuaſion that God is at work for us, and may ſit ſtill ourſelves. And this Perſuaſion, which is generally mere Enthuſiaſm, they dignify with the Name of Chriſtian Faith.

But let us try this Language in a common Caſe, and ſee whether it be ſo hard to be underſtood. Suppoſe a Man wanted to move a Weight, that required double his Strength to move it; Would it not be a very proper Expreſſion, to ſay, Of himſelf he could do nothing? or would it follow, that, if he was offered Help, he ſhould ſit ſtill, and not put his own Strength to the Work? If a Friend came to his Aſſiſtance, would it not be properly ſaid, that his Friend enabled him to do what he did? but would it follow that his Friend did all, and he nothing? I mention this, only to guard Men againſt being miſled by mere Sounds; and ſhall proceed now to conſider ſome

2. Conſequences

Conſequences of the Doctrine and Exhortation of the Apoſtle mentioned in the Text.

And, firſt, it is evident, that the Chriſtian State is not a State of Security; for Security is inconſiſtent with any kind of Fear and Trembling, and is indeed a Condition that does not call even for Care or Diligence. In a State of Security a Man cannot even fear for himſelf; for, to be ſure of Salvation, he muſt be ſure of every Thing that is neceſſary to it: and therefore he muſt either be ſure that he is to have no Part himſelf in working out his Salvation; or, if he is to have any, he muſt be ſure and certain that he ſhall perform it: either of which excludes all manner of Fear and Trembling. Much leſs can he, who is ſecure of being ſaved, fear being puniſhed: So that there is no kind of Fear left for him; and the Apoſtle's Exhortation will have no Meaning in it to ſuch a Man. *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling:* With Fear of what? ſince nothing is left to be afraid of. And yet to be ſure of our Salvation has been made by ſome a neceſſary Sign of Regeneration and Adoption: And hence has proceeded the

Doctrine, that Grace once received can never be loſt: and, if ſo, thoſe who have received Grace, can have no Reaſon to fear and tremble. And yet it cannot be denied that the *Philippians*, to whom the Apoſtle writes, had received Grace; ſince from his own Teſtimony we learn, that *they had obeyed always; that in his Bonds, and in the Doctrine and Confirmation of the Goſpel, they had been Partakers of his Grace.* Grace then they had received; what then had they to fear? if Grace once received cannot be loſt, that is, if Grace gives Security of Salvation. To make then the Apoſtle conſiſtent with himſelf, we muſt affirm, that it is his Doctrine that Grace may be loſt; and that even thoſe, who have made great Progreſs in Goſpel Obedience, are not ſecure of their State; but muſt labour on, and work on with Fear and Trembling, leſt they come ſhort of the Promiſes that they have received. And from hence we may comfort and ſupport good Chriſtians, under the many Fears and Miſgivings of Mind that attend them in their ſpiritual Warfare. That you fear is no Argument of miſtruſting God: We have Reaſon to fear for ourſelves; nor

will

will this Fear be taken from us, till we are removed out of this World. Were there any Reaſon to think, that Security as to our future Condition was among the Gifts of God's Spirit to the true Children of Chriſt, then indeed our Fears would be Matter of Diſturbance to us: But, ſince the beſt muſt fear and tremble, why ſhould we diſquiet ourſelves becauſe we fear for ourſelves? ſince not only our preſent Condition requires it, but it is even Part of our Security to fear, and to labour with Care and Diligence, which is the bleſſed Fruit of holy Fear. To fear that God will not perform his Promiſes to us, is a wicked Fear: But to fear that we may fall ſhort of thoſe Promiſes, is a reaſonable Fear, our preſent Weakneſs conſidered; and it is a Spur to Virtue. And thoſe who would deſire this Thorn in the Fleſh to be removed, may be anſwered, in the Lord's Name, as he anſwered St. *Paul*, *My Grace is ſufficient for you.* You are weak, but the Lord is ſtrong, and his Strength is perfected in Weakneſs: So that, if your Fear be active and buſy, and ſets you to work for the Thing you are afraid to loſe, there is no doubt but that through

Chriſt you ſhall be enabled to do all Things.

Secondly, From hence we may learn what to think of the Works of Chriſtians. It is, you ſee, the Apoſtle's Command, *Work out your Salvation.* Now then Works are neceſſary to Salvation; and it matters little in what Degree they are neceſſary, or how they are to be named: If they are neceſſary, you muſt do them; and that is enough to ſecure the Practice of Virtue, and Holineſs in the World. And for this Reaſon God works in us, that we may not only will, but do; that is, bring our good Inclinations to Perfection: For why does God work in us to will and to do, if Willing and Doing are not neceſſary to our Redemption? And perhaps the good Works of Chriſtians may not deſerve all the hard Words that have ſo liberally been beſtowed on them, if we conſider that they are not the Works of Men, but of God; *for he worketh in us to will and to do:* And therefore our good Works are the Fruits of his Spirit; and are holy becauſe they proceed from an holy Root, the Power of God dwelling in us.

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Laſtly, Hence likewiſe we may obſerve in what Manner God works with the Faithful: St. *Paul* makes it an Argument for Fear and Diligence. From whence it is evident, that God does not ſo work in us, as to exclude our own Care and Induſtry; that is, he does not work irreſiſtibly: For, ſuppoſing God to work irreſiſtibly, the Wit of Man cannot make an Argument out of it for private Care and Diligence. If God does every Thing in us whether we will or no, what is left for us to do? or what have we to fear and tremble for, when God alone has undertaken the whole Care and Buſineſs of our Redemption? The Work of the Spirit upon the Hearts of the Faithful is to actuate and inſpire them: But to perform what is good, is the Buſineſs of him who is actuated and inſpired. Now it muſt be allowed, that it is one Thing to give a Man Power to act, another to force him to act. A Man's Will is not influenced by his own Power. He that has ten times the Power to do a Thing that I have, is nevertheleſs as free to let it alone as I am. And though the Grace of God gives us great Power and

Ability to work out our Salvation, yet the Power to will and to work is no Conſtraint either to will or to work. And in this Senſe the Grace of God is a great Argument for Diligence and Care: For, if he furniſhes us with Power, it behoves us to ſee that we make a right uſe of it.

In a Word then, you have the Aſſiſtance of God to enable you to work; which is a great Reaſon to love and truſt him, ſince he takes this Care of you. Your Danger now is only from yourſelf; it is in your own Power, but in no other Creature's under Heaven, to defeat your Hopes. You only can rob yourſelf of the Aſſiſtance of God by doing deſpight to his Holy Spirit, by not obeying when it is in your Power to obey. Be careful therefore, my Brethren, be watchful over yourſelves; and, whilſt you have Opportunity, *work out your Salvation.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE V.

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that be ſaved? And he ſaid unto them, Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate: For many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THE Fate of the World at the great Day is ſo momentous a Point, and in which every Man, who is conſcious to himſelf that he is accountable for his Actions, is ſo nearly concerned, that it is no Wonder to find Men in every Age inquiſitive and curious to pry into this Event. Hence have ariſen many nice Speculations concerning God's final Judgment of Mankind: Sometimes we are aſked, whether, conſiſtently with the Declarations

of the Goſpel, any of the Heathen World can be ſaved; and ſometimes, whether, the Strictneſs of the Goſpel Morality conſidered, and the viſible Corruption of the World, it muſt not neceſſarily come to paſs that the far greater Part of Mankind ſhall periſh everlaſtingly.

One of theſe Queſtions you ſee propoſed to our Saviour in the Text, *Lord, are there few that be ſaved?* You have alſo our Lord's Anſwer in the Text, and in the Verſes which follow it in St. *Luke*: An Anſwer applicable not only to this, but to all other Queſtions of the like Import; and which therefore very well deſerves your Conſideration.

For the better underſtanding of which Anſwer, we muſt conſider, whence it is that Men, not content to examine themſelves by the Law of God, and to learn from thence how their own Caſe ſtands, are for launching out into the Myſteries of God's Judgments, and enquiring how it ſhall fare with this or that Nation at the General Judgment, and whether many or few ſhall be ſaved at the laſt.

Whoever will examine into the Bottom of Men's Thoughts upon this Subject, will find

find that the Concluſion they make is commonly influenced by the Conſideration of their own Circumſtances. Every Man in this Caſe takes Care of himſelf, and leaves the Way open to his own Salvation, how ſtrongly ſoever he bars it againſt others. The great Advocates of Election and Reprobation always reckon themſelves in the Number of the Elect; and, that their Iniquities, of which they are often conſcious, may not riſe up againſt them, they maintain that the Act of Man cannot make void the Purpoſe of God, or the Sins of the Elect deprive them of the Benefit of God's eternal Decree. Thus ſecured, they deſpiſe the Virtues and moral Attainments of all Men, and doom them with all their Virtues to Deſtruction; whilſt they advance themſelves with all their Sins to a Throne of Glory prepared for them before the World began.

Akin to this was his Conceit who aſked our Saviour the Queſtion; *Are there few that ſhall be ſaved?* The *Jews* were God's peculiar People, and enjoyed very great Privileges: *Unto them were committed the Oracles of God; to them pertained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenants, and*

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the Giving of the Law, and the Service of God, and the Promiſes. But, not content with theſe Privileges, and being thus diſtinguiſhed by God, they will hardly allow God to have any Thing to do with the reſt of the World, unleſs it were by ſevere Judgments to afflict and to deſtroy them. With regard to theſe Prejudices it is that St. *Paul* puts the Queſtion to his Countrymen; *Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not alſo of the Gentiles?* And we know full well that the Goſpel of Chriſt gave greater Offence to the *Jews* in no one Particular, than in opening the Door of Salvation to the *Gentile* World: They looked upon all Nations, but their own, to be unclean, and accounted it *an unlawful Thing for a Man that was a Jew, to keep Company, or come unto one of another Nation:* And St. *Peter* was ſo poſſeſſed with this Opinion, that he ſtood in Need of a ſpecial Warning from Heaven, before he would baptize the honeſt Centurion *Cornelius.* Upon the Foot of this Prejudice the Queſtion is put to our Lord, *Are there few that ſhall be ſaved?* He who knew what was in Man, and underſtood their ſecret Thoughts, gave an Anſwer which

went to the Bottom of the Enquirer's Heart, and without Doubt touched him to the Quick, *There ſhall*, ſays he, *be Weeping and Gnaſhing of Teeth, when ye ſhall ſee Abraham and Iſaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourſelves thruſt out. And they ſhall come from the Eaſt, and from the Weſt, and from the North, and from the South, and ſhall ſit down in the Kingdom of God. And behold there are laſt which ſhall be firſt, and there are firſt which ſhall be laſt.* This Part of the Anſwer was levelled directly againſt the *Jewiſh* Prejudice, and is a plain Declaration that the Salvation of God ſhould be extended to Eaſt and Weſt, North and South, to People of all Parts of the World; and that many, who thought themſelves alone entitled to God's Favour in Virtue of their peculiar Privileges, ſhould for their Miſconduct and Miſbehaviour be finally excluded from his Preſence.

The Controverſy which has been managed among Chriſtians, concerning the Salvation of the Heathen World, turns upon quite another Point than the *Jewiſh* Prejudice did. It carries not with it the ſame Contempt of Mankind. The *Jews* thought

thought none worthy to be Sons of God but themſelves; Chriſtians think all worthy, and are deſirous that all ſhould be made Partakers of the Glory of God. The *Jews* thought no Nation but their own capable of being received into the Covenant of God, and therefore doomed all to Deſtruction without Remedy: the Chriſtian thinks every Nation capable of being admitted into the Covenant of Chriſt; his only Doubt is, whether any Nation, not received into the Covenant, is capable of the Benefits of it. But then conſidering the infinite Numbers of Men already dead, without any Knowledge of the Goſpel, and the great Number ſtill which probably will die in the ſame Circumſtance; this Notion entertained by ſome Chriſtians, with reſpect to ſuch Perſons, ſeems to be as peremptory and relentleſs as the prejudice of the *Jews*. And the Limitation put upon God's Mercy and Goodneſs may be found perhaps to be as preſumptuous, and as injurious to the Honour and Majeſty of God in one Caſe, as in the other. What then muſt we ſay to ſuch Enquirers as theſe? The Anſwer in the Text is given them both for their Inſtruction

ſtruction and their Rebuke, *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate; for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.* As if our Lord had ſaid, You ſeem, by your Curioſity in enquiring after the State of others, to be ſecure and at Eaſe about your own. But turn your Thoughts from others to yourſelf: As great as your Advantages and Privileges are, your Way is ſtill ſtrait and narrow: Strive therefore and labour to ſecure your own Entrance into Life; for many of thoſe who have equal Privileges with you, and profeſs to ſeek the Kingdom of God, ſhall not enter into it.

As the Opinions hitherto mentioned confine the Mercy of God within a narrow Compaſs, and leave the greater Part of Mankind under deſperate Circumſtances; ſo there is another which goes into the contrary Extreme, and ſets the Doors of Heaven open to all Comers, with little or no Regard to the different Qualifications of Men. They who can make no Title to the Kingdom of God under the Terms of the Goſpel, or by the Rules of Virtue and Morality, not willing to give themſelves up to Deſtruction, have perſuaded themſelves

ſelves and others, that it is impoſſible that God ſhould finally doom to Miſery ſo many of his Creatures, as muſt neceſſarily ſuffer if they are to be judged by the ſtrict Rules of Morality, or the no leſs ſtrict Rules of the Goſpel. And having no Hope but in the Mercy of God, no Excuſe but in the Infirmities and Weakneſſes of human Nature, Neceſſity makes them eloquent upon this Subject; and the fineſt Things are ſaid to diſplay the Goodneſs of God, and ſet it forth in the livelieſt Colours; and to repreſent the Diſtreſs of Nature, and the utter Inability of Man to do good in this fallen degenerate State. Thus concluding all Men under Sin, they hope to eſcape in the Crowd: It would be inexorable Cruelty, they think, to make all, or moſt Men miſerable; and therefore, let God be good, and all Men be Sinners, and they are ſafe.

To ſuch Enquirers as theſe, we ſay, That they miſtake in all their Reckoning: For, if it be juſt to puniſh Sinners, no Reaſon can be given why Twenty ſhould not be puniſhed as well as Ten, or an Hundred as well as Twenty. There were Sinners enough in the World to have ſaved the World

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at the general Deluge, if Numbers would have done. When *Sodom* was deſtroyed, ten righteous Men would have ſaved the City; but the Number of the Wicked was never pleaded in Bar of Juſtice. Neither does the Race of Men make ſo conſiderable a Figure in the Syſtem of the Univerſe, as to endanger the Whole, if they miſcarry. Let Men be Sinners, yet God will not want thoſe who will ſerve and obey him: Or, if he ſhould, let him ſpeak the Word, and Millions will ariſe at his Command: *Think not therefore to ſay within yourſelves, We have Abraham to our Father: for God is able of theſe Stones to raiſe up Children unto Abraham.* If all Men ſhould forſake him; he can, when he pleaſes, repair the Loſs: He is not ſo weak, or in ſuch Want of the Service of Men, as to be guided by ſuch politick Reaſons as oftentimes, reaſonably enough, prevail with temporal Princes to ſpare an offending Multitude. Leave therefore the reſt of the World to the Judgment and Mercy of God, and mind you the Law that is ſet before you as the Condition of Life, and *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate.*

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You ſee by this Account, that our Saviour did not think fit to anſwer the Curioſity of this Enquirer: And, ſince he declined the Queſtion, who alone was able to reſolve it, it is abſurd to aſk the Queſtion of any-body elſe; and it is great Preſumption in any-body elſe to pretend to anſwer it. From Natural Religion we may learn much of the Equity and Juſtice of God, and of the Terms of Obedience upon which we may hope to partake of his Mercy: But how many, or how few, will act by the Laws of Reaſon, and qualify themſelves for the Mercy of God, Natural Reaſon and Religion can never ſhew. Nor is there any Reaſon to expect a Reſolution of this Doubt in the Books of Scripture; for had it been a Piece of Knowledge proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the Queſtion was ſo fairly ſtated to him? or why does he give ſuch an Anſwer here, as is plainly calculated not to ſatisfy the Curioſity of Mankind in this great Point, but to reſtrain and to rebuke it? The Queſtion is, *Are there few that be ſaved?* The Anſwer is in effect, What is that

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to you? mind your own Buſineſs, and *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate.*

Two Things there are, in which every Man has a Right to require Satisfaction, and without which he can upon no reaſonable Grounds pretend to Religion: One relates to the Method of God's dealing with Mankind, and comes to this Point, Whether all Men are capable; and, if not all, who are capable of Salvation? The other relates to our own Conduct and Behaviour, and reſolves itſelf into this Enquiry, Upon what Terms we may expect Salvation? Now, as to theſe two neceſſary Enquiries, our Saviour is ſo far from avoiding them, that he has expreſly and clearly determined them. As to the firſt, he has told us, that Salvation belongs to all Men, of every Country and Nation; and that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to receive thoſe who come from the Eaſt, and Weſt, from the North, and South. As to the ſecond, he declares, that all the Workers of Iniquity will be excluded from the Preſence of God; and therefore exhorts us to *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate*: And to quicken our Diligence, and to raiſe in us a Concern equal to the Intereſt we have at ſtake, he informs us

further, *that many who will ſeek to enter, ſhall not be able.* Being thus far inſtructed, what further Demand have you upon your Teachers? Would you know before-hand what your Lot will be? and whether you ſhall be in the Number of thoſe who ſhall ſeek and find, or among thoſe who would enter in, but ſhall not be able? What has a Teacher of Religion to do in this Matter? Is it ever expected of a Lawgiver, that he ſhould tell, who will obey and be happy, and who will tranſgreſs the Law and be puniſhed? Nay, what has a Learner in Religion to do with this Point? Do you want to be made either careleſs or deſperate? Is either State a deſirable one to a Man diſpoſed to be ſeriouſly religious? But you may think perhaps that it would have another Effect upon you; that it will give great Eaſe and Satisfaction to your Mind, to be ſecure as to your future Condition, and enable you with great Chearfulneſs to bear all the Hardſhips and Diſcouragements to which Virtue ſtands expoſed. I am indeed perſuaded that this Effect would often follow; that many Righteous would be reſolutely righteous, and act with Views above this World, and as Citizens

tizens of another Country, upon certain Aſſurance given them of future Glory. But conſider, the Terms upon which we are to be happy in another World muſt be ſuch, as are conſiſtent with our State and Condition in this. It is impoſſible to imagine it to be reaſonable for God to place us in this World, and then to give ſuch Hopes of another, as ſhould render us unfit to ſupport the ſeveral Characters impoſed on us here. And it is much to be doubted whether the beſt Men would not be rendered uſeleſs to this World by ſuch Security given for their own future Happineſs as ſome ſeem to deſire. They would probably be loſt in the Proſpect of their own future Happineſs, and grow ſtupid to the World, and act as if they did, in the literal Senſe, hate Father and Mother, Brother and Siſter: Whereas now the Senſe of Religion under which they live, the Neceſſity they know themſelves to be under to work out their own Salvation, obliges them to diſcharge all the Offices and Duties of Life regularly and honourably; ſince there is no Way of ſecuring our Happineſs in another World, but by doing all the Good we can in this.

And if this Sort of Knowledge would probably render good Men uſeleſs to the World, it would certainly render bad Men exceedingly pernicious to it. Deſpair is the Height of Madneſs; and were all bad Men to be made mad and outrageous, it would perhaps be hard to find Keepers to guard them, and to protect the reſt of Mankind from their Fury. To live amongſt Men who knew themſelves deſtined to eternal Miſery, what elſe would it be but living among the Damned, and being expoſed to all their Malice and Revenge, made ten times more malicious and revengful by their Deſpair?

But if it can ſerve no good Purpoſe to communicate to us this Knowledge with reſpect to ourſelves, and our own future State and Condition, what Purpoſe can it poſſibly ſerve to give us this Knowledge with reſpect to others, and their future Condition? What is it to us to know the exact Proportion between the Good and Bad, or to know how many or how few ſhall finally miſcarry? Would this Knowledge alter our own Condition in any Reſpect? would it affect the Terms of our Obedience, or make it eaſier for us to work

work out our own Salvation? If not, to what Purpoſe is it deſired? unleſs perhaps you ſecretly imagine that God means not to execute his Threatnings againſt Sinners, but will ſave all at the laſt; and you want to be let into this Secret, that you may ſin without Fear. If this be indeed your Caſe, do you not ſee that your Curioſity is irreligious, and ſprings from a corrupted Heart, which wants to be freed from the Fear of Hell, only to enjoy the Pleaſure of Sin? And can you ſtill wonder why God does not gratify ſuch a Curioſity as this, and reveal the ſecret Myſteries of his Providence, to encourage you in Vice and Immorality? It wants but little Reflection in this Caſe to ſee that the Reaſon why this Knowledge is deſired, is a very good Reaſon why it ſhould not be granted.

In general, it is very abſurd to expect that Judgment ſhould go before Trial: And therefore, as this Life is a State of Trial, and is naturally to be followed by a Day of Judgment, it is unnatural to declare the final State of Men before their Trial is over; and with reſpect to any Judgment, but the Judgment of God, it

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is impoſſible; for no other juſt Judge can tell what his Sentence will be before the Trial is over.

The Scope which Men give to their Imaginations upon this Subject, when they leave their only ſure Guide, the Word of God, is always dangerous, and oftentimes fatal to them. If you are contented to take God's Word for the Method he intends to purſue in the Judging of the World, you will ſoon ſee, that, in order to be happy, you muſt be good. If you want Reſtraint, the Threatnings of God are terrible: If you want Comfort, the Promiſes of the Goſpel are the only proper Cordial for penitent Sinners. Thus will you find yourſelf equally guarded againſt Preſumption and Deſpair, ſo long as you follow the Light of God's Word. But if you indulge your own Conceit, and imagine that God will be either better or worſe to you, than he has declared, you expoſe yourſelf to manifeſt Peril. If in the Gaiety of your Heart you imagine God means little by his Threatnings, and made uſe of them only to deter Men from Vice, without ever intending a rigorous Execution, it is very probable that you will take

take Advantage of your own Diſcovery, and abate as much in your own Goodneſs, as you do in God's Severity. If you are of a colder Conſtitution, and more inclined to melancholic Thoughts, your Imagination will ſhew you God clothed only with Terrors; and your Heart, oppreſſed with Fear, will ſink, and leave you no Courage to go on with the Duties of Religion, from which your Fears will ſuffer you to have no Hope or Expectation.

If you extend your Thoughts farther, and lay Schemes for the general Judgment of the World, it is well if this unneceſſary Concern for others does not prove prejudicial to yourſelf. If you confine the Mercies of God to yourſelf and your own Sect only, it is an Opinion which not only aſcribes great Partiality to God, but it tends to introduce Cruelty and Inhumanity into the Temper of every Man ſo perſuaded. We eaſily come to think it a Virtue to hate thoſe whom God hates: And then the Conſequence is, that there muſt be a Stop to all Intercourſe of good Offices with all Men, the few only excepted who think as we think. And thus, by paſſing a raſh Judgment in a dark myſte-

rious Point, and which of all others does leaſt concern us, we ſhall extinguiſh the nobleſt Grace of the Goſpel, the plaineſt Duty of a Chriſtian, and which of all others does moſt affect the Peace and Happineſs of Mankind.

If, in Honour to the Mercy of God, you open the Doors of Heaven to Men of all Profeſſions in the World, who live well according to the Meaſure of Light beſtowed on them; though your Opinion has in it much more Humanity and more common Senſe, than that before mentioned, yet, by thus dealing to all indifferently Graces and Mercies which are not in your Diſpoſal, it is well if you do not hazard your own Share. It is this Opinion, if I am not deceived, that leads many into Contempt of the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus: For, when they think all Religions equally good, and all Men equally ſecure who follow their Religion be it what it will, they raiſe unawares a Queſtion which they cannot anſwer, namely, To what Purpoſe was the Goſpel given? For, if all Men are equally ſecure under all Religions, what can be the Advantage of one Religion above another?

other? When Men are led into this inextricable Maze, by ſetting up themſelves for Judges of the World, they know not where to fix: They loſe all Regard to the beſt and pureſt Religion, by doing ſuch profeſſed and undeſerved Honour to the worſt.

You ſee then how uſeleſs, how dangerous a Thing it is, to go out of our Way to meddle with Things ſo far above us. If you would reſolve to take Care of One, that Reſolution would furniſh you with ſufficient Employment: For, be your Advantages ever ſo great, yet all who have your Advantages will not be ſaved; for of thoſe who ſeek to enter, many will not be able; and many, of whom you little think, may perhaps go before you; for God has thoſe whom he will own, in the Eaſt, and the Weſt, and the North, and the South. Leave him to find out thoſe whom he will honour, and look you to the Point which is indeed your true, your only Concern, the Salvation of your own Soul, and *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait Gate.*

DISCOURSE VI.

LUKE xii. 48.

Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required: And to whom Men have committed much, of him they will aſk the more.

THE Equity of this general Rule is ſo apparent to common Senſe, that it admits of no Diſpute, and calls for no Explanation. A ſingle Mite offered by a poor Widow is a Preſent fit for the King of Heaven, which from the Hand of a rich Man would hardly be a decent Charity to a poor Widow. And thus the Caſe is in all Inſtances to which the Rule is applicable.

But plain as this general Maxim is, yet we are very apt to miſtake in the Appli-

cation of it to particular Caſes: For then Self-Love and Self-Intereſt will not permit us to diſcern that true Proportion of one Thing to another, from which the Equity of the Rule ariſes. If we have any Claim to make in our own Behalf, we think nothing too much, and are apt to overrate the Ability of the Perſon upon whom we have the Demand, and to expect from him much more than he in Reaſon ought to grant: If any Claim be upon us, we are ready enough to excuſe ourſelves, to diſſemble, or to undervalue our Power, and conſequently to do leſs than may in Reaſon and Juſtice be required from us. Hence it is that we are rarely pleaſed with thoſe who are above us, and ſeldom able to ſatisfy thoſe who are below us.

As this Rule has Place in the Intercourſe of all the Offices of Life, ſo ought it eſpecially to influence the Diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments: But the Weakneſs and Wickedneſs of Men have almoſt totally excluded it from human Judicatures. For as it is in every-body's Power to pretend Ignorance of the Law, or ſome other Inability, in Excuſe for the Crimes for which they are to anſwer; were the Plea as eaſi-

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ly admitted as it is pleaded, it would open a Door to all kind of Licentiouſneſs, and take off the Fear of Puniſhment, which is ſo neceſſary a Reſtraint upon the depraved Inclinations of Men: And ſince the wiſeſt and ableſt Judges cannot diſcern, ſome few Caſes perhaps excepted, between real and affected Ignorance; or ſo diſtinguiſh the Powers and Abilities of one Man from another, as to proportion Rewards and Puniſhments according to this Rule; therefore the Law puts all, except thoſe who are manifeſtly deficient in Reaſon, upon the ſame Level, and ſuppoſes every Man to know the Law of his Country; and conſequently, where a malicious Act is proved, a malicious Intention is implied, and the Criminal is ſentenced accordingly.

But how juſtifiable ſoever this Proceeding is, upon the Neceſſity there is for it in order to maintain ſome tolerable Degree of Peace and Quiet in the World; yet it is evident that theſe general Preſumptions, upon which all human Judicatures proceed, do not leave Room for an exact Diſtribution of Juſtice; but it often happens, that Men are made equal in the Puniſhment,

Puniſhment, whoſe Crimes, could all Circumſtances be conſidered, were not equal.

But could you introduce a Judge endowed with the perfect Knowledge of Men's Hearts, there would be an End of all ſuch general Preſumptions: He would do in every Caſe what was exactly right and equitable; and the only ſtanding Rule of the Court would be that of the Text, *Unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required.*

One ſuch Court there is, in which He who knows the Secrets of every Heart will ſit Judge himſelf; before whoſe Tribunal there will want no Evidence to convict the Guilty, no Advocates to defend the Innocent: There no pretended Excuſe will be be admitted, no real one excluded: There every Man with all his Actions, with all his Talents and Abilities, and all his Opportunities of knowing the Will of God, will be weighed in the Balance; and *unto whom much was given, of him ſhall much be required.*

Since then we are to be judged, and finally ſentenced, by this Rule, it concerns us to be careful in the Application of it to ourſelves; for if we miſtake, we ſhall gain

gain only a deceitful Security, and which at the laſt will prove fatal: And there is the more Reaſon for this Care conſidering how apt Men are to make unreaſonable Allowances to themſelves, where their own Intereſt is concerned.

It is no uncommon Thing for Men, who have no Hopes of being juſtified by the Terms of the Goſpel, to take ſhelter in this general Declaration, and to imagine that they ſee an Equity in their own Caſe, which ſhall ſtand between them and the rigorous Execution of the Goſpel Law. When they read in the New Teſtament, that all Whoremongers and Adulterers, all Drunkards and riotous Perſons, all Extortioners and fraudulent Dealers, in a Word, all who in any manner injure their Neighbours and Fellow-Creatures, ſhall without Doubt periſh everlaſtingly; they plainly perceive that the Crimes and the Puniſhment are ſo inſeparably annexed, that, being conſcious of the Crimes, they have no way to ward off the Puniſhment. But when they read, that *unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required,* and infer from thence, that unto whomſoever little is given, of him ſhall

little be required; they immediately conclude, that all their Errors and Miſtakes, of what kind ſoever, are well ſecured: For whoever is in Error, be it through want of Underſtanding, or of the external Means of Knowledge, or be it through Paſſion and Prejudices, does, ſo long as the Error continues, want the Light, and is ſo far to be conſidered as one to whom little is given. This is one Step towards their Juſtification: But ſtill Conſcience remains, and proves that they had the Light in many Inſtances in which they have been Offenders. But then they conſider, that to render a Man accountable for his Actions, it is not enough that he knows the Terms of his Duty, he muſt alſo have Power to put them in Execution: For no Man ought to be puniſhed for not acting, who never had it in his Power to act, or for doing what was not in his Power to avoid doing. Being thus far advanced, they recollect all the Temptations and Incitements they met with, and how ſtrongly their Paſſions were moved to the Commiſſion of thoſe Iniquities of which their Conſcience accuſes them; and, being Judges diſpoſed to favour the Criminal, they conclude

clude, it was not in their Power to do otherwiſe than they did; and ſince ſo little was given them, they ſhall be anſwerable but for little: And thus ſecured they imagine they may ſafely appear before the Judgment-ſeat of Chriſt, and plead to him his own Rule of Equity againſt all the peremptory Laws of his Goſpel.

Allow this Plea, and it will indeed juſtify all Men, and leave no Room for Judgment; but it muſt reflect great Diſhonour and Reproach on him who made them, and has declared to them a Judgment to come, as well by the Reaſon which he has given them, as by the Revelation which he has publiſhed.

Few Men are ſo eſſentially wicked as to chuſe Wickedneſs for its own Sake: either Error or Paſſion is pleaded in all Caſes. The *Canaanites*, who worſhipped the Work of Mens Hands, were greatly in Error; and the wicked Inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* had ſtrong unnatural Paſſions: But theſe by Fire from Heaven, and thoſe by the Sword of *Joſhua*, were rooted out: Which Part now would you take? Were they Sinners, or was the Judge of all the World unjuſt?

If Men are really of ſuch a Make, that their Paſſions are too ſtrong for their Reaſon, and Reaſon of no Uſe but to contrive Means for the Satisfaction of the Paſſions and Appetites; it is impoſſible to juſtify God in giving ſuch Creatures any Notion of a Judgment to come: For to what Purpoſe does it ſerve but to plague and torment them unneceſſarily? And how is it reconcileable with the Goodneſs of God, to plant ſuch Seeds of Miſery in our very Nature? to arm the little Reaſon we have againſt us, which is perpetually placing Fears and Terrors before us, which yet have, can have, no Relation to us?

In order to clear this Matter, there are two Things proper to be conſidered:

Firſt, To what Inſtances this Rule of the Text is extended by our Bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles.

Secondly, How far we may extend and apply this Rule by Parity of Reaſon to other Caſes.

That we may bring this Enquiry within proper Bounds, it is fit to obſerve, in the firſt Place, That the Rule of the Text is never applied in Scripture to extenuate or excuſe immoral Actions upon account

account of the Violence of the Temptation from whence they proceed. So far from it, that even indulging the Paſſion is imputed as Sin, though the immoral wicked Action does not enſue: *He that hateth his Brother*, ſays an Apoſtle, *is a Murderer*; and *he that looketh upon a Woman to luſt after her*, ſays our Bleſſed Saviour, *hath already committed Adultery with her in his Heart*. If the Caſe be ſo, if Hatred has in it the Guilt of Murder, and Luſt has the Guilt of Adultery; how ſhall Murder be excuſed becauſe it proceeds from violent Hatred, or Adultery becauſe it proceeds from violent Luſt? St. *James* has plainly condemned the Profaneneſs of juſtifying our Iniquities by accuſing our Conſtitutions, and conſequently by accuſing him who made us: *Let no Man ſay when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man. But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Luſt, and enticed. Then when Luſt hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: And Sin when it is finiſhed, bringeth forth Death.* James i. 13, 14, 15. All Sin is here deſcribed to be the Effect of violent and inordinate Luſt

and Paſſion: But this is ſo far from being conſidered as an Excuſe for Sin, that it immediately follows, that Sin ſo produced *bringeth forth Death.* The Scripture has recorded to us the immoral Actions of many Perſons; but is there any Inſtance where ſuch Immoralities are pitied or excuſed becauſe of the Luſt and Paſſions from whence they proceeded? Nay, however apt Men are to make ſuch Excuſes for themſelves, they are not apt to make them for others. When you read that *Ahab* ſlew *Naboth*, are you apt to ſay, Poor Man, how could he help it, for he longed extremely for his Vineyard? When you read that *David* ſlew *Uriah* and corrupted his Wife, do you excuſe his Iniquity, becauſe his Paſſion was ſtrong? If you do, it is more than he did for himſelf; for when he came to himſelf he cried, *I have ſinned againſt the Lord.* Which one ſorrowful Confeſſion of his Iniquity was worth a thouſand of the Excuſes which Men uſually make in like Caſes. In the Verſes before the Text, our Saviour puts the Caſe of thoſe who have received much, and of thoſe who have received leſs: Of thoſe who received leaſt

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he ſays, *They ſhall be beaten* for doing Things *worthy of Stripes:* By which it appears, that all who have Senſe to diſtinguiſh between Good and Evil are ſubject to Judgment; and no Hope is given them of being ſaved by the Strength of their Paſſion, when they act againſt the Light of their Reaſon.

But there will be Occaſion to conſider this Particular again, in ſtating the Caſe or Caſes to which the Rule of the Text is applied in Scripture.

Now the Rule as applied in Scripture does chiefly concern thoſe who enjoy the Light of God's Word, and have the Advantages of the Goſpel to enable them to work out their Salvation: Theſe are they who are ſaid in the Text *to have received much:* and the Compariſon lies between them, and the reſt of the World who have the Light of Reaſon only to direct them; and theſe laſt mentioned compared with the others are they *who have received little.*

The Caſe of theſe two Sorts of People is very accurately ſtated in the Verſes before the Text, which muſt therefore be conſidered. *That Servant,* ſays our Bleſſed

Saviour, *which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himſelf, neither did according to his Will, ſhall be beaten with many Stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, ſhall be beaten with few Stripes. For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall much be required.*

The Caſe, you ſee, is put with reſpect to Sinners under the different Circumſtances of knowing, and not knowing, the Will of their Lord. What we are to underſtand by the *Will of their Lord* will appear if we conſider, that they who *knew not* the Will of their Lord are yet ſuppoſed here to *do Things worthy of Stripes*; which ſuppoſes them to have the Light of Reaſon, and a Knowledge of the Difference between Good and Evil: For no Man can in a moral Senſe be ſaid to do Things worthy of Stripes, unleſs he has Reaſon to diſtinguiſh between the Things which are, and which are not, worthy of Stripes. Since therefore they who have this Light of Reaſon are yet ſuppoſed *not to know their Lord's Will*, it is evident that *to know the Will of our Lord* implies ſomething more than having the Light of Reaſon to direct us; and conſequently muſt mean

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our having the Light of God's Word for our Direction.

Secondly, You ſee that Sinners under all Circumſtances are condemned to Puniſhment. They who know their Lord's Will are condemned for not doing *according to his Will:* They who knew not his Will are not condemned for not doing according to the Rule of which they had no Knowledge, but they are ſentenced for committing Things *worthy of Stripes*, that is, ſuch Things as they, according to the Light they had, knew to be ſinful. And this agrees exactly with what St. *Paul* to the *Romans* has declared: *As many as have ſinned without Law, ſhall alſo periſh without Law: And as many as have ſinned in the Law, ſhall be judged by the Law.*

But then, as the Knowledge of God's Will is a great Advantage to thoſe who know it, ſo will their Puniſhment be in proportion greater, if they offend againſt this Knowledge: They therefore *ſhall be beaten with many Stripes.* Others, though their Iniquities and Offences againſt the Light of Reaſon, which God gave them, ſhall not go unpuniſhed; yet ſhall their Puniſhment be mitigated in reſpect to what

others muſt endure, and *they ſhall be beaten*, but *with few Stripes*.

This general Determination agrees with a more particular one to be found in the Chapter before the Text; *Wo unto thee, Chorazin, wo unto thee, Bethſaida: For if the mighty Works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented in Sackcloth and Aſhes. But it ſhall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgment than for you.* Luke x. 13, 14.

Tyre and *Sidon* were Cities diſtinguiſhed in the *Jewiſh* Prophets for their great Abominations and Iniquities; and the *Jews*, it is likely, thought that it would fare worſe with none at the Day of Judgment than with thoſe Cities. But our Saviour tells them it ſhould fare worſe with the Cities which had ſeen his mighty Wonders, and yet refuſed to repent at his Call. Which Judgment of his was far from juſtifying or excuſing the Iniquities of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, or giving any Promiſe of Impunity to their Sins: It ſuppoſes them to be reſerved to great Judgments, and threatens ſtill ſeverer Puniſhment to thoſe who under greater Advantages were equal Sinners.

Conſider

Conſider now the World as divided into two Parts; one whereof has had the Oracles of God committed to them, and enjoyed the Light and Direction of his Word; and the other has been left to the Guidance of mere Reaſon and Nature, and that Knowledge of Good and Evil to which no rational Creature can be an utter Stranger; and you may, from the Maxim of the Text, learn theſe general Truths with reſpect to each Sort and Condition of Men:

Firſt, That no Man ſhall be judged by a Law of which he had no Knowledge, but every Man ſhall ſtand or fall by the Light that was given him: It being true of every moral Action, what St. *Paul* has affirmed of Almſgiving, *It ſhall be accepted according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

Secondly, That immoral Actions admit of no Excuſe, but will ſubject every Man to the Judgment of God. For Morality not being founded primarily upon the Authority of Revelation, but upon that Reaſon which is a common Gift to Mankind, every Man muſt anſwer for the Uſe of

of his own Reaſon: And where Reaſon ſhews him the Difference of Good and Evil, if he chuſes the Evil he is without Excuſe. There is no Juſtification, no Excuſe, to be offered for Sin in this Caſe: It is in vain to plead Paſſion or Temptation, for Reaſon was given for this very purpoſe, to govern Paſſion: And the ſubmitting to Paſſion and Temptation againſt the Light of Reaſon is the very Depravity and Corruption of Heart that calls for Vengeance: And therefore to plead Paſſion as an Excuſe for acting againſt your Reaſon, is to plead your own Iniquity as a Reaſon why you ſhould not be puniſhed. The Rule laid down by St. *James* is deciſive in this Point, *To him that knoweth to do Good, and doth it not, to him it is Sin.*

It may be ſaid perhaps, that the Notions of Morality differ in different Places; and that, through the Power and Force of Cuſtom and Education, the Things which appear to ſome to be worthy of Stripes, appear to others in another Light, and to have nothing criminal in them. Be it ſo: For I mean not to conteſt this Piece of Hiſtory at preſent. But yet, I ſay,

ſay, this avails not in the preſent Argument, nor affords any Advantage to them who ſeek to excuſe Iniquity by pleading Paſſion and Infirmity. Where there is no Conſciouſneſs of Sin, there is no Room to look out for Excuſes: And therefore whatever Allowance may be made to thoſe, who in ſuch unhappy Circumſtances ſin without Knowledge; yet certain it is, that all who contrive Excuſes for themſelves can have no Advantage of this Circumſtance: For the very making an Excuſe ſhews the Conſciouſneſs of Sin, and is a Conviction that you have in your own Opinion committed Things worthy of Stripes. How fooliſh a Thing then is it to loſe the Proſpect of Pardon, by deceiving yourſelf into an Opinion that you do not want one? Such Sins may be forgiven through Repentance, but no Art, no Wit, of Man will ever juſtify them.

Thirdly, It appears from this Determination made by our Bleſſed Saviour, That all who know the Will of God, and live under the Light of his Goſpel, ſhall, whether they like it or whether they like it not, be finally judged according to the Goſpel. The Rule is peremptory; *All who know*

know the Will of their Lord, and prepare not themſelves, nor do according to his Will, ſhall be beaten with many Stripes. Men act ſometimes as if they thought it were in their own Power to chuſe what Law they would be judged by. As ſoon as they profeſs Natural Religion they look upon themſelves to have no farther Concern with the Goſpel, but ſeem ſatisfied that they ſhall be judged by their own Notions. But if the Goſpel of Chriſt be indeed, as indeed it is, the Will of God, it will not be ſo eaſily parted with. It is the Law of our great Maſter, and obey it we muſt. The Advice of a Friend we may uſe or refuſe as we think fit; but the Laws of our Superiors muſt be obeyed. True, you'll ſay, ſuppoſing it to be the Law of our Superior: but that is the very Thing which you cannot admit. Look well to it, that this Perſuaſion be not your Crime: The People of *Chorazin* and *Bethſaida* did not believe in Chriſt Jeſus, yet the Evidence placed before their Eyes was ſuch, that their Diſbelief was the very Circumſtance which rendered their Caſe more deplorable than that of *Tyre* and *Sidon*. The People of *Jeruſalem* were alſo Unbelievers,

Unbelievers, yet ſuch was their Unbelief, that at laſt the Things which made for their Peace were hid from their Eyes. Here then is your Caſe: You have the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus before you; it claims your Obedience upon no ſlight Credentials; it was introduced by greater Works than ever Man did; it was ſealed with the Blood of its great Author, and has been handed down to you by thoſe who ſacrificed all that was dear to them in the World in Confirmation of its Truth. Think not then that it can be an indifferent Matter whether you receive or reject this Law; or that it matters not by what Light you walk, ſince you expect ſo much Equity from God that he will judge you according to the Light you have: For if the Goſpel be the Law of God offered to you, as it certainly is, and you are in the Number of thoſe *unto whom much was given, of you therefore ſhall much be required.*

The Mercy of God offered to you in the Goſpel through Chriſt Jeſus is a Call to Repentance from dead Works: It is a Summons to you, to turn to the living God in Works of Righteouſneſs and Holineſs.

lineſs. When *John the Baptiſt* gave Notice of the near Approach of our Bleſſed Lord, the Sum of his Doctrine was, *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* Our Saviour and his Diſciples introduce the Goſpel with the ſame Warning; and St. *Paul* teaches, that God, who winked at the Times of Ignorance, now, under the Goſpel, *calleth all Men every-where to Repentance; and hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs.* If then the great Promiſes made through Chriſt Jeſus belong only to Penitents, who forſake Sin, and turn to God in Newneſs of Heart, how ſadly do Men impoſe upon themſelves, who truſt to be ſaved by God's Mercy, without doing the Work of God, and continue in Sin in Hopes that Grace may abound? Little do they conſider that thoſe falſe preſumptuous Hopes will prove in the End great and real Aggravations of their Iniquity. To ſin in Hopes of Mercy, is abuſing the Mercy of God, and making the Goodneſs of our heavenly Father a Reaſon for diſobeying him. To plead the Death or Merits of Chriſt in Excuſe or in Juſtification of Iniquity, will ſo little avail, that it will amount to

a Condemnation out of our own Mouths. *Chriſt died to deſtroy the Works of the Devil, to redeem us from Sin, to ſanctify an elect People to God:* Every Chriſtian knows this, or may know it, if he looks into his Bible. Conſider now what the Plea in Excuſe for Sin amounts to: In the Mouth of a Chriſtian it muſt come to this; I know that Chriſt died to deſtroy Sin, but I will keep my Sins, and truſt in his Death: I know that the Promiſes of God are made to thoſe only who forſake their evil Deeds; but I will depend on his Promiſes for the Pardon of my evil Deeds, though I forſake them not. Theſe are the Perſons, who, by abuſing Chriſt and his Redemption, do put him to open Shame in the World, and, in the Language of the Apoſtle, *do crucify to themſelves afreſh the Son of God.* Happy had it been for ſuch Men had they been born in the darkeſt Corners of the Earth, to which the glad Tidings of the Goſpel never came: Then they might have pleaded Ignorance, and Weakneſs, and Want of the Knowledge of God's Will: But now they live, and act, and reaſon like Heathens in the Noonday-light of the Goſpel. And what can be the Conſequence

ſequence of ſuch a Life, and ſuch a Knowledge, but this only, *that they ſhall be beaten with many Stripes?*

As to ourſelves, we have great Reaſon to bleſs God daily that by his good Providence we have been born and educated in a Chriſtian Country; that we have been admitted into the Church of his Bleſſed Son, and have had betimes the Means of Knowledge and of Grace communicated to us: But let us take Heed that we do not turn theſe Bleſſings into Curſes upon ourſelves by our abuſing them. Theſe are great Talents which our Bleſſed Lord has entruſted us with, if we uſe them as we ought: If we improve them to the Glory of God, and the Good of them about us, happy will it be for us, and we ſhall one Day hear that bleſſed Sentence, *Enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* But if we neglect theſe great Opportunities of Salvation which God now affords, they will one Day riſe up in Judgment againſt us, and condemn us. And it ſhall be more tolerable for *Sodom* and *Gomorrha* in that Day, than for wicked Chriſtians who were redeemed by the Croſs of Chriſt, but who accounted the Blood of the Covenant a vain Thing;

who were ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt, but did Deſpight to the Spirit of God; who were bought with a Price to be the Servants of God, but who ſold themſelves for Slaves to Iniquity.

Lay hold therefore, my Brethren, of the Mercy of God, while the Day of Mercy laſts; for if you neglect or deſpiſe the Goodneſs of God, which calleth us to Repentance, this will be your Condemnation, that *Light is come into the World, and you choſe Darkneſs rather than Light.*

DISCOURSE VII.

LUKE IV. 1, 2.

And Jeſus being full of the Holy Ghoſt, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the Wilderneſs, being forty Days tempted of the Devil.

AFTER our Saviour had waſhed his Diſciples Feet, and wiped them with a Towel, *he ſaid unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?* None anſwering this Queſtion, he explained to them himſelf the Meaning of what he had done: *Ye call me,* ſays he, *Maſter, and Lord: And ye ſay well; for ſo I am. If I then, your Lord and Maſter, have waſhed your Feet, ye alſo ought to waſh one another's Feet. For I have given you an Example, that ye ſhould do as I have done*

to you. Verily verily, I ſay unto you, the Servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is ſent, greater than he that ſent him. If ye know theſe Things, happy are ye if ye do them. Should you aſk the like Queſtion concerning the Hiſtory in the Text, our Saviour's Temptation in the Wilderneſs, and ſay, What is this that has been done unto him? How came the Son of God to be thus inſulted by the Powers of Darkneſs? Whence aroſe the Tempter's Confidence and Power? or why were conſummate Virtue and Innocence ſubmitted to this Proof and Trial? You might be anſwered in like Manner alſo, *He hath given us an Example, that we ſhould do as he hath done.* Were you to hear the Complaints, which even good Men often make, that they are forced to ſtruggle with many and with great Temptations; that the Paths of Virtue are ſlippery and inſecure, beſet with many Dangers; and that their Prayers to be delivered from their Trials come empty back and bring no Bleſſing with them; you might in our Saviour's Name and in his Words expoſtulate the Caſe with them: *Ye call me Lord and Maſter: And ye ſay well; for ſo I am.*

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If I then your Lord and Maſter have been perfected through Trials, and in all Things, tempted even like unto you, whence come your Complaints? whence is it that you expect to be exempted from that Condition to which I willingly ſubmitted? *The Servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is ſent greater than he that ſent him.* I have led the Way, and ſhewn you how to conquer: And *if ye know theſe Things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Since theſe Things therefore are written for our Inſtruction and Admonition, the propereſt Uſe we can make of them is to conſider them in that View, and to keep at a Diſtance from ſuch nice Queſtions, as no Man enters into with Diſcretion, or gets out of with Advantage. There is Room in all the Parts of the Goſpel Diſpenſation to admire and adore the Wiſdom and the Goodneſs of God, if that will content us, without prying into the ſecret Methods of his Providence. In this Caſe now before us we want not Matter of this Kind: When the Tempter allured our firſt Parents to Diſobedience with the flattering Hopes that they ſhould be as Gods, little did the blind Prophet think

that the Day ſhould ever come when the Son of God would appear in the Likeneſs of Man, to take Vengeance of his bold Attempt, to deſtroy his Works, and to redeem the Captives into the glorious Liberty even of the Sons of God: Little did he imagine that Man, who fell by aſpiring to be like God, ſhould ever indeed be ſo like him, as to be ſuperior to all his Arts and Temptations, and be able to drive him from the Dominion he had uſurped over the Creation. And yet, behold the Wiſdom and the Goodneſs of God! By Man came Death, and by Man came the Plenteouſneſs of Redemption: The firſt Fruits of which we ſee in this Victory over the Tempter.

Thus with reſpect to God does this Temptation afford an ample Subject of Praiſe and Glory: But, conſidered with reſpect to ourſelves, it will yield us the greateſt Comfort and Conſolation to ſupport us in our ſpiritual Warfare, and the beſt Inſtruction how to behave ourſelves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the Tempter's Art was diſplayed againſt our Saviour: Here then we may learn the worſt we have to fear, and ſee the

the Dangers we have to paſs, in our Way to Happineſs, and ſecure ourſelves againſt the Surprizes which are often fatal to heedleſs unguarded Innocence: Here too we may learn from the beſt Example how to make the beſt Defence againſt the different Temptations we ſtand expoſed to; how manfully to maintain the Combat, and to reſiſt the fiery Darts of the Devil.

Theſe Leſſons of Chriſtian Prudence and Fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's Conduct and Behaviour under the different Trials the Tempter made of him: But I propoſe at this Time to conſider the Circumſtances which attended this Temptation, and are recorded by the Evangeliſt in my Text: *And Jeſus being full of the Holy Ghoſt, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the Wilderneſs, being forty Days tempted of the Devil.* Now this Temptation, we ſee, ſucceeded immediately to his Baptiſm, in which the Spirit viſibly deſcended upon him; and God declared him, in a Voice from Heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleaſed. And accordingly the Text expreſly tells us, that he

was led to be tempted *being full of the Holy Ghoſt.*

You ſee the Power of Baptiſm, and the Bleſſings that are annexed to it, to which all are entitled who partake in the Baptiſm of Chriſt: For himſelf he was neither born nor baptized, but for our ſakes; that the Bleſſings of both might deſcend on us who through Faith are Heirs together with him of the Promiſes of God.

By Baptiſm the Gates of Heaven are ſet open to us, and the Way paved for our Return to our native Country: By Baptiſm we are declared to be ſuch Sons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be Heirs of his Kingdom: By Baptiſm we receive the Promiſe of the Spirit, by which we cry, Abba, Father.

Are not theſe great Privileges? And is not here room for mighty Expectations? And yet how unſuitable to theſe Claims do the Circumſtances of a Chriſtian's Life often appear? He is upon the Road to Heaven, you ſay, and the Gates ſtand open to receive him; but how does he ſtumble

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and fall like other Men, and ſometime loſe his Way, and wander long, bewildered in Night and Darkneſs? or, if he keeps the Road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were unwilling to come to his Journey's End, and afraid to ſee the Country which he is going to poſſeſs? The Chriſtian only of all Men pretends to ſupernatural Power and Strength, and an intimate Acquaintance with the Spirit of God: And yet how hardly does he eſcape the Pollutions of the World, and how often look back with languiſhing Eyes upon the Pleaſures, Riches, and Honours of this Life? And though he boaſts of more than human Strength, yet how does he ſometimes ſink below the Character and Dignity even of a Man? Ye Sons of God, for ſuch ye ſay ye are, how do ye die like the Children of Men, and how like is your End to theirs?

And what muſt we ſay of theſe Things? Is the Promiſe of God become of none Effect? Is Baptiſm ſunk into mere outward Ceremony, and can no longer reach to the purifying the Heart and Mind? The Fact muſt not be diſputed: It is

too

too evident, at leaſt in theſe our Days, that the Lives of Chriſtians do not anſwer to the manifold Gifts and Graces beſtowed on them: And it is as true, that this has given great Occaſion to the Enemies of the Goſpel to blaſpheme, to ridicule the Grace of God, which ſeems to them to be no real, no uſeful Gift or Power. But then, it is certain, on the other ſide, that theſe Prejudices have ariſen from the miſtaken Notions which Men have entertained concerning the Grace of God: Their Expectations have been groundleſs and unwarrantable: they have promiſed themſelves more than ever God promiſed them; and then, finding that Grace is not what they expected and hoped it was, they raſhly conclude that it is nothing; and argue againſt the Truth of God's Promiſes merely from the Vanity and Deluſion of their own. If you expect that the Grace of God ſhould ward off all Temptations from you, or reſcue you from the Power and Influence of them, notwithſtanding your own Remiſſneſs and Want of Care; as well may you expect that Swords and Piſtols ſhould fight your Battles, ſubdue your Enemies,

Enemies, and conquer Countries for you, whilſt your Soldiers lie diſſolved in Eaſe and Luxury, and forget to uſe their Arms. The Graces of the Spirit are the Arms of a Chriſtian, with which he is to enter the Liſts againſt the Powers of Darkneſs; and are a certain Indication to us that God intends to call us to the Proof and Exerciſe of our Virtue: Why elſe does he give us this additional Strength? We had Strength enough of our own to ſit ſtill and do nothing? Had it been his Intention to remove us out of the Way of Temptation, and to place us out of Danger, our Weakneſs and our Security might well have ſtood together; and having no Enemy to fear, we ſhould not have been in need of ſo powerful an Ally as the Spirit of God. But ſince our Dangers are great, and even neceſſary to the Trial of our Faith and patient Continuance in Well-doing, therefore are we ſupported and encouraged by the Aſſiſtance of God, *to fight the good Fight*, and *to endure Hardneſs as good Soldiers of Jeſus Chriſt*. To this we are called by the Example of our Lord and Maſter, who being full of the *Holy Ghoſt*,

was

was led by the Spirit *to be tempted:* And this plainly intimates to us, that the more abundant Grace we receive, the more Reaſon we have to expect Trials and Temptations; and *that to whom much is given, of him ſhall much be required.*

And if this be the Caſe, as moſt certainly it is, we may, I think, as neceſſary Conſequences deduce theſe two Things:

Firſt, That the Temptations which good Men are expoſed to, and often are forced to ſtruggle hard with, are no Proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his Favour and Kindneſs are in any Degree leſſened toward them.

Secondly, That the Sins which Chriſtians fall into, and continue in, are no Proof that they had not the Spirit and Grace ſufficient to have preſerved their Innocence.

Let us conſider theſe two Caſes. The Temptations which good Men are expoſed to, and are forced often to ſtruggle hard with, are no Proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his Favour and Kindneſs are in any Degree leſſened toward them. And yet the Dread of this is but too common an Ingredient in the Temptations which good Men

ſuffer

ſuffer under: It is that which always lies at bottom where there are any Symptoms of Deſpair; and when an honeſt Soul is haraſſed with Doubts and Miſgivings of Mind, and perſecuted with diſmal Thoughts and Fears, both of what is preſent, and what is to come, it is from this bitter Root, generally ſpeaking, that all the Miſery ſprings. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the Spirit of God, the wicked one would either not dare to approach them, or, if he did, that they ſhould ſoon be able to quench his fiery Darts, and to command him with Authority, to get behind their Backs. But when the Temptation grows upon them, and though often repulſed, yet as often with redoubled Force renews the Aſſault, then they begin to ſuſpect themſelves, to fear leſt they are given up to Deſtruction, and deſerted by the Spirit of God. And when theſe Fears poſſeſs the Heart, like Spies and Traitors got within the Town, they betray the Strength of it to the Enemy; they ſtifle all the generous Thoughts of vigorous Oppoſition, and leave the Heart, thus bereaved of Courage and Conſtancy, and Fidelity to itſelf, an eaſy Prey to the Invader.

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The firſt Thing then neceſſary in our ſpiritual Warfare is rightly to apprehend our own Condition, and the Dangers and Difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come we may be under no Surprize, but may be able to ſtand firm, and collected both in Courage and in Counſel, to make our juſt Defence. And for this Purpoſe did the Author and Captain of our Salvation leave us his Example, that it might ſerve equally for our Inſtruction and Imitation. And hence we may learn, that our Temptations are ſo far from being a Proof that we want the Spirit of God, that they are rather a Proof of the Contrary: *God is faithful, and will not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.* And therefore, if he ſuffers our Temptations to be great, he will adminiſter Strength great in Proportion. For the firſt Part of our Saviour's Life, we read of no Temptations that befel him; but no ſooner did he receive the Spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He ſtill conquered, and yet ſtill was purſued. The Tempter though baffled gave not over, but addreſſed to him with new

Art and Cunning, in Hopes ſtill to prevail. Full forty Days was he under Trial, ſifted in every Part, expoſed to the Horrors of the Deſert, to the Neceſſity of Hunger: But neither the Neceſſity of Hunger, nor the Horrors of Darkneſs, nor the forty Days Temptation, could move him from his ſtedfaſt Confidence and Truſt in God. And who was it, I beſeech you, that was left thus expoſed to theſe cruel Trials and Temptations? Was it not He whom God but juſt before had by a Voice from Heaven declared *to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleaſed?* And can you ſtill think that your Temptations are any Signs that God has forſaken you, that he has at once withdrawn his Spirit and his Love from you? Can you think the Continuance of your Temptations any juſt Ground for Deſpair, when Chriſt himſelf was tempted forty Days? For forty Days without Intermiſſion was he tempted: How ſoon the Temptation was again renewed, how frequent or how long the Returns of it were, we cannot tell: But that the Tempter ſtill purſued him, and watched all the Seaſons and Opportunities of approaching him with

Advantage,

Advantage, is plainly intimated by the Evangeliſt, in the thirteenth Verſe of this Chapter; *And when the Devil had ended all the Temptation, he departed from him for a Seaſon.* He departed, but like an Enemy that is rather enraged than ſubdued by his Overthrow he departed with Reſolutions to try his Fortune again, and in his Flight he meditated his Return. Go, now, and complain, that your Life is full of anxious Care and Trouble, that every Day brings its Trial with it, and every Night its Temptation; and much you fear that God has withdrawn his Holy Spirit from you, and no longer regards you with the watchful Eye of a tender Father, but has given you up to uncertain Fears, to Anguiſh and Deſpair in this World, and to Ruin inevitable in the next: But when you remember that through all theſe Dangers and Difficulties Chriſt has led the Way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and expoſed, you muſt bluſh at your Complaints, and with Confuſion of Face confeſs, that you have charged God fooliſhly, and with the holy Pſalmiſt ſay, *It is mine own Infirmity.*

Whatever

Whatever you may think, there is more Reaſon to ſuſpect yourſelf, and even to fear concerning the Love of God, when all Things are calm and ſerene about you, and when you ſtand as it were exempted from the common Burden of Life, your Body free from Pain, and your Mind from Care. One would be apt to ſuſpect that the Enemy of Mankind thought himſelf ſecure of you, and that there wanted no Trials and Temptations to urge on your approaching Ruin: Elſe why ſhould he neglect you only, whilſt with the greateſt Diligence and Application he is exerciſing with Tortures both bodily and ſpiritual all the reſt of the Sons of God? The beſt and the only Thing we can ſay to this, is, That Proſperity itſelf is the greateſt of Temptations, and the ſevereſt Trial of Virtue and Innocence; and that the Tempter leaves Men to ſink under the Charms of Plenty and Indolence, as the ſureſt Method he can make uſe of. And if this be ſo, I am ſure our Eaſe and our Plenty call upon us for the utmoſt Diligence and Care, for the conſtant Exerciſe of all thoſe Virtues that are proper to our Sta-

tion. If we ſee others led to Virtue by Hardſhips and Poverty; let us reflect that we want thoſe Tutors and Guides, and that inſtead of them we have only Charity and Humility to follow: By the Exerciſe of theſe we may reap the Fruit of the others, and at laſt be found in the Number of thoſe who mourned with thoſe who mourned.

If others ſtruggle with Temptations of divers Kinds, and are perfected with Trials, whilſt we enjoy an inward Peace and Reſt of Soul, let us remember that we want the Advantages they have. And ſince God has not called us to reſiſt Evil, as he has called others, he certainly expects that we ſhould do more Good: It is their Buſineſs to defend their Virtue againſt the Aſſaults of Vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmoleſted Virtue, muſt improve it in a conſtant Exerciſe and Diſcharge of all the Duties of Piety and Religion, in keeping a ſtrict Hand over our Paſſions, that Proſperity be not our Ruin. If others are forced to ſerve conſtantly upon the Guard, and to watch againſt the Encroachments of Vice, and have Work enough to ſecure an unblemiſhed Innocence;

we,

we, who are placed in the inmoſt and ſecureſt Receſſes of the Lord's Vineyard, where no Dangers can approach to moleſt and diſturb our Peace; we, I ſay, ought to labour the more zealouſly to till and improve the Soil, that we may be able at the laſt to render a good Account of the Talent committed to our Uſe.

Secondly, It appears from the Circumſtances of this Hiſtory of our Lord's Temptation, that Trials and Temptations may be great and ſevere, where the Gifts and Graces of the Spirit are adminiſtered in the largeſt Proportion: And ſince thoſe who are tempted may fall, for otherwiſe Temptations would be no Trials, it appears that thoſe who have the Gifts of the Spirit and Grace ſufficient, may nevertheleſs fall into Sin through the Power of Temptations, and the Want of Care and Diligence on their own Part. It is a falſe Comfort therefore which Sinners adminiſter to themſelves, when they excuſe their Sins by laying all the Blame upon their own natural Infirmities, and the Want of God's Grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to thoſe who are not wanting to themſelves; and

though he ſuffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this Reſtriction upon the Tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The Inſtruction which I propoſe to you from this Conſideration is this, That whenever you are ſo unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuſe your Offences, and charge God fooliſhly as if he had been wanting to your Aſſiſtance; but that you rather conſider your own Iniquity as your own, and inſtead of excuſing your Sins, and adminiſtring thereby a falſe Comfort to your Soul, you labour through a timely Repentance to correct and amend what is amiſs, and endeavour to regain the true Peace of Mind, by reconciling yourſelves to God, and by a ſpeedy and reſolute Return to your Duty.

In a Word, it is no Man's Fault that he is tempted, it is the Condition of our ſpiritual Warfare; it is the Combat to which God calls us for the Proof and Trial of our Virtue. Then only are we guilty when we give Way to Temptations, and forſake God to follow the Pleaſures

Pleaſures or the Gains of Wickedneſs. And whenever this is the Caſe, there is but one Remedy, Repentance through Faith in Chriſt Jeſus, which will never be refuſed when it comes from a ſincere Heart, touched with a lively Senſe of God's Goodneſs and its own Unworthineſs.

DISCOURSE VIII.

2 Cor. vii. 10.

Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance to Salvation not to be repented of: but the Sorrow of the World worketh Death.

YOU have, in the Words of the Text, a Character given you of Religious Sorrow, and the Advantages of it ſet forth, and illuſtrated by a Compariſon between them and the evil Effects of worldly Sorrow. Sorrow in all Caſes ariſes from the Conceit of Miſery either preſent or expected. When our Sorrow grows from the Conſideration of our ſpiritual Condition, from a Senſe of our own Iniquity, and the Pains of a guilty Mind; from the Fear of God's Wrath and

heavy Judgments denounced againſt Sinners; which are the proper Objects of Religious Sorrow, and diſtinguiſh it from the Grief of a worldly Mind, which reaches only to the real or ſuppoſed Evils of this Life: In this Caſe, Sorrow is not only the Conſequence of the Evil we ſuffer or apprehend, but likewiſe its very Cure and Remedy. But in worldly Grief, where Men lament the Loſs of Riches and Honours, and vex their Souls with the various Diſappointments of Life; which are perpetual Springs of Uneaſineſs to all whoſe Affections are wedded to the Pleaſures and Enjoyment of the World; there Sorrow is a Remedy worſe than the Diſeaſe, and adds Weight to our Misfortunes, which could they be neglected, they would not be felt.

It is the Glory of Philoſophy to raiſe Men above the Misfortunes of Life, to teach them to look with Indifference upon the Pleaſures of the World, and to ſubmit with manly Courage and a ſteady Mind to thoſe Calamities which no Care can prevent, and which no Concern can cure. Such are all the Miſeries which

are

are brought on us by a Change of Fortune, or the Neceſſity of human Condition. And the Conſiderations of Philoſophy not extending beyond theſe Limits, it is no wonder to find Wiſdom placed in an Abſence of Paſſion; and Grief and Sorrow and all the tender Motions of the Mind expoſed as certain Marks of a ſlaviſh abject Spirit. But when the Reaſons of Philoſophy are transferred to the Cauſe of Religion, they loſe their Name; and the ſame Concluſions, for want of the ſame Principles to ſupport them, are fooliſh and abſurd. In natural Evils, Sorrow and Grief of Mind give us the quickeſt and ſharpeſt Senſe of our Afflictions, and diveſt us of the Power of looking out for the proper Comforts and Supports: they increaſe and lengthen out our Miſery; nor can the Mind ever loſe Sight of its Afflictions, till Length of Time ſets it free from Grief, or the very Exceſs of Sorrow ſo far ſtupifies the Senſe of Feeling, that it deſtroys itſelf. And when it leaves us, often it carries off with it our Strength and Health, and bequeathes to us a weak Body and a feeble Mind, and entails upon

on the very beſt Days of our Youth the very worſt Infirmities of Age and Sickneſs: *for the Sorrow of the World worketh Death.* But in ſpiritual Evils, where Sin and Guilt threaten the Life of the Soul, and haſten to bring on us Death eternal, Sorrow is the beſt Indication of Life, and, like the Pulſe in the natural Body, ſhews there is ſome Heat and Vigour ſtill remaining: As it increaſes, it brings with it the Symptoms of Recovery; Sin and and Guilt fly before it; Life and Immortality follow after it. And the Mind thus purged by religious Sorrow ſends into the Heart freſh Streams of Pleaſure, and abounds with all the Joys which the Senſe of the Love of God, the preſent Poſſeſſion of Peace, and the firm Expectation of future Glory can produce: *For Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of.* From the Conſideration of theſe different Effects of worldly and of religious Sorrow, the Apoſtle with no leſs Truth than Art inſinuates to the *Corinthians*, how truly he had acted the Part of a Friend towards them, in bringing them to a due Senſe

of

of Sorrow for the Sins they had committed. It is the Part of a Friend to eaſe our Minds of Grief, to ſtep in between us and Sorrow, and to make us, as far as it is poſſible, forget our Misfortunes: Why then do the Miniſters of Chriſt perpetually ſuggeſt new Fears to us, and ſtill labour to awaken our Souls to a Senſe of their Miſery, and to fill us with Sorrow, by continually repreſenting to us the Greatneſs of our Loſs? To this let the Apoſtle anſwer for himſelf, and for all: *I rejoice not that ye were made ſorry, but that ye ſorrowed to Repentance.* If from worldly Sorrow there can ariſe nothing but certain Pain and Miſery, if the Anguiſh of Mind produces Feebleneſs of Body, and the lamenting our paſt Misfortunes renders us incapable of the Enjoyments which are preſent, happy is the Man who can bear up againſt Afflictions, and with an undiſturbed Mind ſubmit to thoſe Evils which no Sorrow can either eaſe or prevent. But if in godly Sorrow the Effects are juſt contrary, if Grief can blot out the Guilt of Sins paſt, and preſerve us from the Infection for the Time to come; if it

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brings Eaſe to a wounded Spirit, and makes us to be at Peace with ourſelves, and with God; if it renders Life comfortable, and Death not terrible; if it rids us of Fear for the preſent, and fills us with Hope full of future Glory: how happy then are they who go to the Houſe of Mourning, and by a wiſe Choice eſcape the Puniſhment of Sin, by ſubmitting to the Sorrow of it?

How theſe bleſſed Fruits grow out of godly Sorrow, will appear to you from the Apoſtle's Words in the Text, in which the Effects of godly and worldly Sorrow are fully expreſſed in few Words: *Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of; but the Sorrow of the World worketh Death.* In which Words you may obſerve, firſt, that Sorrow is diſtinguiſhed from Repentance; for *godly Sorrow* is ſaid to *work Repentance*, and is therefore ſuppoſed to have the ſame Relation to it that the Cauſe has to its Effect. Secondly, You may obſerve that *Sorrow* is not ſaid to *work Salvation* immediately and of itſelf, but by the Means of that Repentance which it produceth. Thirdly,

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You may obſerve that *worldly Sorrow* is ſaid to produce *Death* immediately: It brings forth nothing analogous to Repentance, but does indeed confirm and ſtrengthen the evil Diſpoſition from which it grows. Fourthly, The Death which is wrought by worldly Sorrow is oppoſed to the Salvation which follows Repentance; and may therefore ſignify eternal Death, as well as temporal; the Truth of the Propoſition admitting either or both of theſe Explications. As I explain and enlarge theſe Obſervations, I ſhall take in what I judge neceſſary to give you a diſtinct Conception of the Nature of godly, and of worldly Sorrow, and to ſhew the Effects of both.

Firſt, then, you may obſerve that Sorrow is diſtinguiſhed from Repentance; for *godly Sorrow* is ſaid to *work Repentance*, and is therefore ſuppoſed to bear the ſame Relation to it as the Cauſe does to its Effect. In common Speech we are apt to ſpeak of Sorrow for Sin under the Name of Repentance, and to aſcribe to it the Effects belonging only to Repentance: But the Apoſtle in the Verſe before us has plainly another Notion of Repentance, ſince the common Notion would make an Abſurdity

ſurdity in the Text; for if by Repentance you underſtand Sorrow for Sin, the Apoſtle muſt then be underſtood to ſay that godly Sorrow produces Sorrow for Sin; that is, that godly Sorrow produces itſelf, ſince that only is godly Sorrow which is upon the Account of Sin. Repentance therefore is diſtinct from Sorrow, and is wrought by it, and properly denotes a Change of Mind: Which is indeed the natural Effect of godly Sorrow, and the neceſſary Condition of Salvation; and muſt therefore be the true and genuine Explication of that Repentance which ſtands in the Middle between godly Sorrow and Salvation, as proceeding from one, and producing the other. And ſo diſtinct is this Change of Mind from Sorrow, that of all its Effects it is the happieſt; Eaſe and Comfort attend on it, Joy and Hope flow from it. This is a Change *not to be repented of*; it can never cauſe us any Grief or Pain, or give us Reaſon to lament any Effect proceeding from it.

Sorrow then is not Repentance, though it be the Cauſe of Repentance in moſt Caſes. The Alliance between them will be beſt explained by conſidering the Nature

ture of Sorrow in general, and the Impreſſions it makes upon every Man's Mind. Whatever is the Cauſe of our Sorrow muſt needs be the Object of our Averſion; ſince to take Pleaſure in the Thing that grieves us, and cauſes us Pain, is a Contradiction in Nature. Many Things occaſion us Sorrow which are out of the Reach of our Power, which come without our ſeeking, and go without our bidding. In all theſe Caſes Sorrow is an uſeleſs Paſſion, for the Averſion ariſing from it brings Torment without Security; for to what Purpoſe can our Love or our Concern ſerve, where the Objects are neither to be obtained or avoided by our utmoſt Care? Should we afflict ourſelves with the Thoughts of Death, and raiſe in our Minds the utmoſt Horror and Dread, yet Death will move with the ſame Pace to us, not retarded by our Fears, or ſtopped by our Averſion. And this ſhews how ridiculous a Paſſion Sorrow is in all theſe Caſes.

But where Good and Evil are ſet before us, and we are left to chuſe for ourſelves, if through Weakneſs or Folly, or the prevailing Power of any Paſſion, we have choſen amiſs, the Pain we ſuffer from

theſe

theſe Evils of our own inviting is the beſt Security for the future: We cannot lament the Folly of our Choice, without condemning ourſelves for making it, and hating the Thing which has brought ſo much Sorrow along with it. This Self-Condemnation will teach us to correct our Choice for the future, this Averſion will turn the Stream of our Affections from the Thing which brings ſo much Miſery with it. But this can extend but to very few Inſtances of worldly Concern, ſo little is there in our own Power; for which Reaſon, worldly Sorrow can only make us feel our Misfortunes, without enabling us to redreſs them. But in ſpiritual Concerns the Caſe is otherwiſe: Virtue and Vice are placed within our Choice; and we cannot do Evil till we have firſt determined ourſelves to do it: And, when we have done it, the ſooner our Minds recoil and grow ſick of their unhappy Choice, ſo much the better; ſince the Correction of Folly is often the Parent of Wiſdom, and the Miſery we ſuffer through Vice the beſt Guide to the Paths of Virtue. Sin cannot be the Cauſe of our Sorrow, but it muſt likewiſe be the Object of our Averſion:

Averſion: The natural Conſequence of which is Repentance, or a Change of Mind, by which we ſhall hate the Vices we once delighted in, and fly to the Arms of Virtue, to taſte thoſe Pleaſures which Experience has taught us are there only to be found. And thus you ſee how naturally a Change of Mind ariſes from godly Sorrow, or Sorrow for Sin: which is a farther Confirmation of the Interpretation we have given of the Apoſtle's Words.

Secondly, *Godly Sorrow* is not ſaid to *work Salvation* immediately and of itſelf, but by Means of that *Repentance*, or Change of Mind, which it produceth.

This ſhews you, that a Change of Mind, and conſequently a Change of Life, is abſolutely neceſſary towards the obtaining the Mercy and Forgiveneſs of God; and that it is to little Purpoſe to lament your Sins, unleſs you reſolve to forſake them. So many are the ſad Effects of Sin, with reſpect to our Health, our Reputation, and our Fortune in the World, which always ſuffer, and often ſink, under the Oppreſſion of Vice, that the Sinner who has no Fear of God before his Eyes has Reaſon enough to be

ſorry for his Sins. But Sorrow ariſing from theſe Motives is mere worldly Sorrow: One laments the Decay of his Health, another the Loſs of his Reputation, and a third the Ruin of his Fortune, and often one laments the Loſs of All: And equally they would have lamented theſe Loſſes, had they come from any other Cauſe beſides Sin. He that is ſorry for his Sin becauſe it has deſtroyed his Health, would have been as ſorry had a Fever deſtroyed it; he that grieves for the Loſs of his Fortune, would have grieved in the ſame Manner if Fire or the Rage of the Sea had been his Undoing. From whence it is plain, that in ſuch Sorrow as this no Regard is had to God, whom we are principally to reſpect in our Repentance, as being the Perſon againſt whom we have offended, and whoſe Mercy and Pardon we labour to obtain.

In true Sorrow that produces Repentance, the Senſe of our Guilt is a great Ingredient, as well as the Senſe of our Miſery. The very Hopes we have of obtaining Pardon at the Hand of God will fill our Minds with Indignation againſt ourſelves

ſelves for having offended ſo gracious a Maſter. For if we can think him good to forgive us, we muſt needs think ourſelves wicked, and loſt to all Senſe of Gratitude and Goodneſs, that we could offend ſo kind and compaſſionate a Lord. From this Senſe of Guilt will ariſe Indignation; and Fear, and Zeal; and every Paſſion will be rouſed to act its Part in making us hate and abhor ourſelves and our Iniquities, and will never let us be at Peace with our own Hearts, till we have purged them of every evil Luſt, and conſecrated them anew to the Service of our Maker. And this is that bleſſed Change which is true Repentance *unto Salvation never to be repented of.*

Fear may ſometimes prevail againſt the Power of Luſt, and the Wretch who hates to think of God may not be able to exclude the Fear and Dread of him: When the Flames of Hell play before the Sinner's Eyes, and Guilt, conſcious of its own Deſerts, fills the Imagination with all the Horrors of Damnation; in this Caſe there will never want Sorrow, though perhaps there be no Signs of Repentance. Thus

Judas grieved, in his Grief he died, and in his Death he found the Pains of Hell.

In the Goſpel there are no Promiſes made to Grief and Sorrow; the Mercies of God are offered upon the Condition of Repentance: And though in the Nature of the Thing Repentance muſt ariſe from Sorrow, and therefore Sorrow may be eſteemed as a Part of Repentance; yet Sorrow that produces not Repentance, that is, a thorough Change and Reformation, is of no Account in the Sight of God. Such Sorrow may be the Sinner's Due; if he ſuffers under it, he has but his Reward; it is the juſt Puniſhment of his Iniquity, but can never be the Condition of his Pardon.

One would think this were too plain a Caſe to be miſtaken; yet ſo commonly it is miſtaken, that Repentance is grown almoſt into a Form and Method, and inſtead of reforming their Sins, Men ſet themſelves ſo many Days to be ſorry for them. Alas! it is a fruitleſs Grief they labour to affect themſelves with; and they may aſſure themſelves their Hopes of Pardon will be as empty and deluſive as

their

their Sorrow. Were you truly ſenſible of your Guilt, there would need no Art to produce Sorrow, you would want no Rules to limit your Grief by; Nature would be your beſt Inſtructor, and teach you to lament your Miſery, and your Guilt with unſought-for Tears and Groans: were you ſincere, you would fly the Viper that had ſtung you, and not cheriſh and careſs the Beaſt, whilſt with falſe Tears you bathe the Wound you have received.

Godly Sorrow is that which reſpects God. This Sorrow will always produce Repentance, and be followed by Salvation, in Virtue of the many Promiſes of God, by which we are aſſured that when the Sinner is converted, and turns to the Lord, forſaking the Evil of his Ways, *he ſhall ſave his Soul alive.*

Repentance unto Life is the Gift of God to a ſinful World, and the greateſt that Heaven ever beſtowed on it: For though Nature is no Stranger to the Grief and Sorrow of Repentance, yet is Repentance our Title to Life through the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus. And therefore, when the *Gentiles* were admitted to be Partakers of

the Goſpel, and the News thereof was brought to the Apoſtles and Brethren at *Jeruſalem*, they bleſs God for his great Goodneſs in having *granted to the Gentiles alſo Repentance unto Life*.

The Nature of this godly Sorrow we ſhall ſtill better underſtand, by comparing it with worldly Sorrow, and ſhewing the Difference between them.

Thirdly, then, you may obſerve that *worldly Sorrow* is ſaid immediately to *work Death*: It brings forth nothing analogous to Repentance, but does confirm and ſtrengthen the evil Diſpoſition from which it grows.

There is ſuch a Connexion between the Paſſions, that one cannot be powerfully ſet on work, but it muſt move and engage the others in their ſeveral Spheres. Thus the Apoſtle, in the Chapter of my Text, tells us that the godly Sorrow of the *Corinthians* produced Fear and Indignation, Zeal and vehement Deſire, and Revenge. And thus it muſt be: Whatever afflicts us is the Object of our Hatred and Fear; whatever we lament the Loſs of, that we muſt needs vehemently deſire and long after; and

and our Grief for the Loſs will rouſe us to recover, if poſſible, the Thing we lament for. This being agreed, you need only conſider the Cauſes from which worldly Sorrow and godly ariſe, to ſee the Workings of both, and the different Effects which they muſt produce. The covetous Man laments for the Loſs of his Wealth, or regrets that his Gains have been no larger: What muſt the Conſequence be? This Grief will produce no Change in him: Covetous he was before, his Sorrow for his Wealth will make him ſtill more ſo: His Induſtry to grow rich will be enflamed by his Sorrow, his Concern not to part with what is left will increaſe by his Anxiety, and he will be ten times more a Slave to the World than ever he was before. Conſider the ambitious Man's Diſappointment, and his Sorrow that flows from it; the Caſe will be ſtill the ſame: How will his Vexation urge him to repair his Defeat, and make him perhaps diveſt himſelf entirely of all the Regards to Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice, eſpecially if he has once found them to ſtand in his Way? Thus, you ſee, in all Caſes worldly Sorrow confirms the evil Habits from

which it grows, and is therefore the moſt direct Way to Death.

For the like Reaſon godly Sorrow will lead to Life; for Sin being the Cauſe of Sorrow, all the Paſſions will be moved to diſpoſſeſs it: Hope and Fear, and Zeal, and vehement Deſire, will unite their Force to throw out Sin, which ſtands in the Way of all their Views. From whence muſt proceed an entire Change of the Man, and he that is heartily ſorry for his Sins will moſt certainly forſake them.

In godly Sorrow we grieve for having enjoyed too much of the World to the Hazard of loſing the more valuable Pleaſures of Immortality: In worldly Sorrow we lament our having had too little of the World. It is evident then that Sorrow in one Caſe will make us fly the World and its Allurements; in the other it will render us but the more eager to purſue and overtake them. In one Caſe, Sorrow does as it were new-make the Man, gives him new Deſires and Diſpoſitions of Mind, teaches him to ſhun the Pleaſures he once embraced with eager Appetite, and to ſeek new Joys and

Comforts

Comforts which before he was a Stranger to. In the other Caſe, Grief confirms the old Habits, quickens the old Deſires, and makes a Man ten times more worldly-minded than he was before; ſo that his laſt State is even worſe than his firſt. And this will appear by conſidering, in the laſt Place,

Fourthly, That the Death which is wrought by worldly Sorrow is oppoſed to the Salvation which follows Repentance, and may therefore ſignify eternal Death as well as temporal, the Truth of the Propoſition admitting either or both of theſe Explications.

The natural Effect of Grief, conſidered as ſuch, is to waſte and impair the Strength, to deaden the Faculties of the Mind, and to make a Man uſeleſs to himſelf and his Friends: So that where this Paſſion enflamed to any Degree has been long in Poſſeſſion, it leaves nothing of the Man, but the outward Form, and hardly that. This, I ſay, is the Effect of Sorrow in general: But then here lies the Difference between godly Sorrow and worldly Sorrow: The firſt, in every Step, tends to Peace and Joy, and its moſt natural Effect is to de-

ſtroy itſelf, and leave the Mind in perfect Eaſe and Tranquility. The Sinner's Tears, though they ſpring from Grief, are yet the moſt ſovereign Cordial to an afflicted Heart, and like Showers in Summer portend a cooler and more refreſhing Air. But worldly Sorrow knows no Reſt, it has no Period; it ſtill urges Men to new Purſuits after the World, and the World has new Diſappointments in reſerve to baffle all their eager Care. Every Diſappointment is a new Occaſion of Grief; and the whole Gain of this Paſſion for the World, being fairly computed, amounts to this, *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit.* Thus the Caſe ſtands if we regard only the Comforts of this Life. The Sorrow for Sin produces the Pleaſure of Righteouſneſs, which is a perpetual Spring of Joy and ſpiritual Conſolation: Whilſt the worldly Man, purſuing falſe Enjoyments, is ever reaping real Torments. But if we change the Scene, and look into the other World, the Difference grows wider ſtill: The Time is coming when the Tears of Repentance ſhall be wiped away, when the Sinner's Grief ſhall ſtand between him and Judgment, and the Shame which he took

to

to himſelf ſhall protect him from Shame at the great Appearance of the World. But worldly Sorrow will then have an heavy Account to paſs; thoſe guilty Tears which were ſhed for tranſitory Pleaſures of Mortality will ſtand in Judgment againſt you, and exclude you from the Joys of that Life which is for evermore.

The Confuſion and Diſtreſs of that Time will be more than I can deſcribe, or you imagine; they will exceed even the Fears of Guilt, and be more gloomy than even Deſpair could ever paint them. The whole is compriſed in the Words of the Text, *The Sorrow of the World worketh Death.*

DISCOURSE IX.

PART I.

1 PETER ii. 11.

Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as Strangers and Pilgrims, abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, which war againſt the Soul.

THE Exhortations of Scripture to abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, or Luſts of the Fleſh, are ſo many, the Expreſſion itſelf is ſo familiar to Chriſtians, and ſo well underſtood, that there is no need, I think, of many Words to explain the ſubject Matter of the Advice now before us. Some Sins are privileged by their Impurity from being expoſed as they deſerve: A modeſt Tongue

Tongue cannot relate, nor a modeſt Ear receive an Account, without great Pain, of the various Kinds of Lewdneſs practiſed in the World: For as the Apoſtle to the *Epheſians* remarks, *It is a Shame even to ſpeak of thoſe Things which are done of them in ſecret.* Had he lived in our Times, he might perhaps have varied his Phraſe, and ſaid, *which are done of them in publick.* Theſe Impurities are, in one Senſe of the Word, no longer *Works of Darkneſs*, they appear at Noon Day. Since therefore they no longer affect to be diſguiſed, they will ſpeak for themſelves what they are: I have no Mind to ſpeak for them.

The Apoſtle in the Text has pointed out to us the common Source from whence Vices of this kind proceed; they ariſe from *fleſhly Luſts:* Words which carry a Reaſon in them, to all who value their Reaſon, not to give themſelves up to the Dominion of Appetites, made not to govern, but to ſerve the Man. But Reaſon, when it becomes a Slave to Vice, muſt do the Drudgery of Vice, and ſupport its Cauſe: And therefore, upon this Topick, Vice has borrowed ſome Aſſiſtance from Reaſon, and made a Shew of arguing in its own Defence. Theſe *fleſhly Luſts*, as the Scripture calls them, others are willing

to

to call natural Deſires: And then the Queſtion is aſked, How it becomes ſo heinous an Offence to comply with the Deſires which God, for wiſe Reaſons, has made to be Part of the Nature which he has given us? Were this Queſtion aſked in Behalf of the Brute Creatures, we would readily Anſwer, we accuſe them not: But when Man aſks it in his own Behalf, he forgets that he has another Queſtion to anſwer before he can be entitled to aſk this, For what Purpoſe was Reaſon and Underſtanding given to Man? Brutes have no higher Rule to act by than theſe Inſtincts and natural Impreſſions; and therefore, in acting according to theſe, they act up to the Dignity of the Nature beſtowed on them, and are blameleſs. But can you ſay the ſame of Man? Does he act up to the Dignity of his Nature, when he makes that his Rule which is common to him and the Beaſts; when he purſues the ſame Inclinations, and with as little regard to Vertue and Morality? Why is Man diſtinguiſhed from the Brute Creatures by ſo ſuperior a Degree of Reaſon and Underſtanding, by a Knowledge of moral Good and Evil, by a Notion of God his Creator and Governor, by a certain Expectation of Judgment, ariſing from a Senſe of his being accountable, if

after

after all there is but one Rule of acting for him and for the Beaſts that periſh? Let theſe Deſires be natural; yet tell me, Does the Addition of Reaſon make no Difference? Is a Creature endowed with Knowledge at Liberty to indulge his Deſires with the ſame Freedom, as a Creature that has no Reaſon to reſtrain it? If this be abſurd, it is to little Purpoſe to plead that the Deſires are natural, ſince we have Reaſon given us to direct them, and are not at Liberty to do whatever Appetite prompts us to do, but muſt in all Things conſider what is reaſonable and fit for us to do: For ſurely there is no Caſe in which a reaſonable Creature may renounce the Direction of Reaſon.

It will be further urged, To what Purpoſe were theſe Deſires given, which are apparently the Cauſe of much Miſchief and Iniquity in the World, and oftentimes a great Diſturbance to the beſt in a Life of Religion? In reply to this, it will be neceſſary to conſider how far theſe Deſires are natural.

If we look into Mankind, we ſhall find that the Deſires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are ſuch as are neceſſary to the Preſervation of Individuals, and ſuch as are neceſſary for the Preſervation of the Species. At the ſame time that we find

find theſe natural Deſires, we diſcover the Ends which Nature has to ſerve by them; and Reaſon from thence diſcerns the true Rule for the Government and Direction of them. Our Bodies are ſo made, that they cannot be ſupported without conſtant Nouriſhment: Hunger and Thirſt therefore are natural Appetites, given us to be conſtant Calls to us to adminiſter to the Body the neceſſary Supports of the animal Life. Aſk any Man of common Senſe now, how far theſe Appetites ought to be indulged; he cannot help ſeeing that Nature calls for no more than is proper for the Health and Preſervation of the Body, and that Reaſon preſcribes the ſame Bounds; and that when theſe Appetites are made Occaſions of Intemperance, an Offence is committed againſt as well the Order of Nature, as the Rule of Reaſon. The Exceſs therefore of theſe Appetites is not natural but vitious: The intemperate Man is not called upon by his natural Appetites, but he does, in Truth, call upon them to aſſiſt his Senſuality, and often loads them ſo hard that they recoil, and nauſeate what is obtruded upon them. An habitual Drunkard may have, and has, I ſuppoſe, an uncommon Craving upon him; but the Exceſs of his Craving is not natural:

It is not of God's making, but of his own, the Effect of a long practiſed Intemperance: And ſuch an Appetite will be ſo far from being an Excuſe, that it is itſelf a Crime.

In other Inſtances of a like Nature, they who have inflamed Deſires, commonly owe the Exceſs of them to their own Miſconduct. There is a great deal of Difference between Men of the ſame Temper, where one ſhuns, and where the other ſeeks the Temptation; where one employs his Wit to miniſter to his Appetite, and the other uſes his Reaſon to ſubdue it: The Paſſions of one, by being uſed to Subjection, are taught to obey; the Appetites of the other, knowing no Reſtraint, take fire upon every Occaſion; and the corrupted Mind, inſtead of oppoſing, endeavours to heighten as well the Temptation as the Sin: And often it is ſeen, that the Reliſh for the Sin outlaſts the Temptation: A plain Evidence that there is a greater Corruption in ſenſual Men than can be charged upon natural Inclination.

Since therefore the Deſires of Nature are in themſelves innocent, and ordained to ſerve good Ends; ſince God has given us Reaſon and Underſtanding to moderate and direct our Paſſions; it is in vain to plead our Paſſion in Defence or Excuſe of Senſuality, unleſs

unleſs at the ſame time we could plead that we were void of Reaſon, and had no higher Principle than Paſſion to influence our Actions: For if it be the Work of Reaſon to keep the Paſſions within their proper Bounds, the reaſonable Creature muſt be accountable for the Work of his Paſſion. And ſo the Caſe is in human Judicatures: Anger and Revenge, Pride and Ambition, are very headſtrong Paſſions, and the Cauſe of great Miſchief in the World; but they cannot be alledged in excuſe of the Iniquity they produce, becauſe the Reaſon of the Offender makes him liable to anſwer for the Extravagance of his Paſſion. Take away Reaſon, and bring a Madman or an Ideot into Judgment, and the Magiſtrate has nothing to ſay to him, whatever his Paſſions, or the Effects of them, may be.

It is the Work of Reaſon then to preſide over the Paſſions: And ſeeing it is ſo, let us conſider what great Motives we have to guard againſt the Irregularities of them. St. *Peter* is very earneſt in the Exhortation of the Text, *Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as Strangers and Pilgrims abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, which war againſt the Soul.* Here are two Things offered to our Conſideration as Motives:

Firſt, That we are *Strangers and Pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abſtain from fleſhly Luſts.

Secondly, That *fleſhly Luſts war againſt the Soul*, and therefore we ought to abſtain from them. I ſhall conſider them in their Order.

Firſt, We are *Strangers and Pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abſtain from fleſhly Luſts.

St. *Peter* directs this Epiſtle to the *Strangers ſcattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Aſia, and Bithynia*; which has led ſome to think that he applies to them in the Text under the ſame Notion, and calls them *Strangers and Pilgrims* upon account of their Diſperſion upon the Earth: But I ſee no Force in the Exhortation upon this View. With reſpect to Religion and Morality, there is no more Reaſon to abſtain from Vice in a foreign Country than in your own. There may poſſibly be ſometimes prudential Reaſons for ſo doing: But this is too narrow, and too mean a Conſideration, for an Apoſtle of Chriſt to build ſo weighty an Exhortation on it, as that of the Text. We muſt look out therefore for a more proper Meaning of theſe Words, and more ſuitable to the Occaſion. And we need not look far for it: In the firſt Chapter of this Epiſtle, Verſe 17.

St.

St. *Peter* thus exhorts, *If you call on the Father, who without reſpect of Perſons judgeth according to every Man's Work, paſs the Time of your ſojourning here with Fear.* It is plain that St. *Peter* here calls the Time of Life the Time of our ſojourning here; and conſequently reckons us to be Strangers and Pilgrims as long as we are in this World. In the ſame Senſe the Author to the *Hebrews* ſpeaks of the Saints of old, *Theſe all died in Faith, not having received the Promiſes, but having ſeen them afar off, and were perſuaded of them, and embraced them, and confeſſed that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth*, Heb. xi. 13. This Notion extends to all Mankind, and ſhews that the Apoſtle looked upon them all as Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth: Conſequently the Exhortation founded upon this Notion extends to all alike, and reaches as far as the Obligations of Morality reach. And this Conſideration, placed in this View, has great Weight in it, with reſpect to all who have Faith enough to *deſire a better, that is, an heavenly Country*, and to know themſelves to be but only Paſſengers through this World, and on their Way to *a City prepared for them.* This is putting all our Hopes and Fears, with reſpect to Futurity, in balance againſt

the Sollicitations of ſenſual Pleaſure: This is appealing to our Reaſon, to ſhew us how abſurd it is to give ourſelves up to momentary Enjoyments, in a Place where we have no certain Abode, at the Hazard of forfeiting our Right to that Country where we have an Inheritance which ſhall endure for ever. Wiſe Travellers do not uſe ſo to entangle themſelves in the Affairs of foreign Countries, as to cut off all Hopes of a Return to their own Home: Such eſpecially as belong to a Country in no Reſpect to be rivalled by any other Place, and are entitled to a large Share of the Wealth and Honour of it; ſuch, I ſay, will not ſuffer their Thoughts and Cares to be ſo engaged Abroad as to forget their own Inheritance, which waits to be enjoyed, and which, once enjoyed, will recompence all the Fatigues and Hazards of the Journey. But this Compariſon conveys to our Minds but a faint Image of the Caſe before us: One Country may differ from another, but no one differs ſo much from another as to repreſent to us the Difference between Heaven and Earth. Many are entitled to great Degrees of Honour and Riches in their own Countries; but no Man is entitled to ſo much on Earth as every Man is entitled to in Heaven, if he forfeits

forfeits not his Hopes by ſacrificing them to the mean and low Enjoyments of the World. Put the Caſe, that a Man was ſo framed by Nature as to hold out a thouſand Years in his native Air, and to be hourly in Danger of Death in foreign Parts, and at beſt able to hold out but to ſixty or eighty Years at moſt: How eagerly would ſuch a Man preſs homewards, if ever he found himſelf in another Country? How would he deſpiſe the ſtrongeſt Temptations of Pleaſure that ſhould pretend to ſtay him but a Day? How contemptible would all the Honours and Glories and Riches of foreign Kingdoms appear to him, when put in the Balance againſt the ſecure and long Life to be enjoyed at home? Add to this Suppoſition one Circumſtance more, That the Man is by Nature made for the Enjoyments which his own Country only can afford, That all the Pleaſures elſewhere to be found are attended with Pain and Uneaſineſs in the Purſuit, liable to many Vexations and Diſappointments; the Enjoyment of them turbulent and tranſient, the Remembrance of them irkſome and oftentimes tormenting: In this Caſe what would a wiſe Man do? Would he not reject with Diſdain ſuch Enjoyments as theſe, and call up all the Strength of his Mind, ſummon all the

Powers of Reaſon to withſtand Temptations ſo deſtructive to his natural and real Happineſs?

But what Need to dwell on Suppoſitions, when the Truth of our Caſe, fairly repreſented, will appear in a ſtronger Light than any Suppoſition can place it?

If we have immortal Souls, and that we have Nature ſpeaks within us, this Place we are ſure is not their native Country: Nothing immortal can belong to this Globe, where all Things tend to decay; which ſhall itſelf be one Day conſumed, and this beautiful Order be ſucceeded by a new Confuſion and another Chaos. Were this the only Place to which we have Relation, we might juſtly complain of Nature for the ſad Proviſion ſhe has made for Man: He only, of all the Creatures of this lower World, wants an Happineſs ſuited to his Capacity. The reſt of the Creatures ſeem ſatisfied and happy, to the full Meaſure of their Capacities, by the Proviſion made for them. Man alone finds no true Enjoyment here, but is ever reſtleſs, and in purſuit of ſomething more than this World can give. If ſomething more is in reſerve for him, his Deſires are well ſuited to his Condition, and the Wiſdom of God is diſcernible in giving

Man

Man Deſires fitted for nobler Enjoyments than this Life affords, ſince for Man much nobler Enjoyments are prepared. Theſe Deſires are given to be a conſtant Call to him to remember the Dignity of his Creation, and to look forward to the better Hopes of a better World; and to govern and reſtrain the Appetites which, too freely indulged, ſet him upon a Level with the Brutes, and diſqualify him for the Happineſs proper to rational Beings.

Taking this to be the Caſe, what is it a wiſe Man has to do, but to get as well through this World as he can; I had almoſt ſaid as faſt as he can, that he may arrive at thoſe Enjoyments in reſerve for him, which will yield a full as well as an endleſs Satisfaction? What can he think of the Pleaſures of this World, but that they are below the Care of him who is born to ſo great Expectations? Thus he muſt think even of innocent Delights; they are frail, tranſitory, and uncertain, he is immortal: Theſe therefore are but unworthy Objects of his Deſires; fit to be uſed, but too mean to be courted; proper for his Diverſion, but never good enough to become his Buſineſs, or to employ his Thoughts in the Purſuit of them. But guilty Pleaſures, the ſenſual Enjoyments and

and Pollutions of the World, appear to him in a more ugly Form: He is upon the Way, haſtening to the Place where his Heart is fixed: Senſual Pleaſures are Robbers which frequent his Road, and lie in wait to take away his Life and his Treaſure: Theſe he will fly, for they are dangerous, and he has all his Wealth about him; even his Hopes and Expectations of Immortality, which dye away if once he falls into the Snares of Senſuality.

Conſider this Caſe fairly, look to the Glory and Immortality which are placed before you, and the everlaſting Habitation prepared for thoſe who ſerve their Maker in Holineſs, and keep themſelves unſpotted from the World: Then view the Temptations which ſurround you, which would fix you down to this World, and intercept all your Hopes; and tell me what more powerful Argument there can be to abſtain from fleſhly Luſts than this, That ye are Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth, and look for another, even an heavenly Habitation.

Let us eat and drink, for To-morrow we dye, ſay the Diſciples of *Epicurus*: Commendable in this, that their Exhortation is ſuitable to their Principle. There is no Inconſiſtency in exhorting Men to make the beſt

beſt of this World and the Pleaſures of it, when you teach them there is no other to be expected: But ſurely it is to the higheſt Degree abſurd to teach the ſame Doctrine, without aſſerting the ſame Principle. There is not common Senſe in ſaying, Let us eat and drink, for after this Life we ſhall enter upon another without End. Yet this is the wiſe Exhortation which every Man makes, who pretends to believe a future State, and yet pleads for a Liberty to indulge his Appetites in this. Yes, ſay you: But God, who knows what he has prepared for us hereafter, has yet given theſe Appetites: And how can it be ſo inconſiſtent with our future Expectations to gratify our Appetites at preſent, ſince our Appetites as well as our Expectations are natural, and both derived from the ſame Original? This is the Capitol of the Cauſe, the darling Argument of the ſenſual Man. But ſuppoſe this World to be a State of Trial, ſuppoſe theſe Appetites to be given partly for the Proof of our Vertue, how will the Conſequence ſtand then? God has given us Appetites for the Trial of our Vertue, therefore we may indulge our Appetites without any Regard to Vertue: How? No Man ſurely can reaſon thus: It can never follow that we are at Liberty to ſin, becauſe

cauſe God has thought fit to call us to a Trial of our Vertue. But if God has given us Appetites, and made it Part of our Trial to govern and reſtrain them within the Bounds of Temperance and Juſtice, and you will nevertheleſs infer, that becauſe God has given theſe Appetites, we may therefore indulge them to the utmoſt; what is it but making that a Licence to Sin, which God and Nature intended for a Trial of Vertue?

But you will inſiſt further perhaps, and aſk, How it is conſiſtent with God's Goodneſs to work ſuch Temptations as theſe into the very Nature of Mankind? A notable Queſtion! But if you attend to it, it comes to this, How is it conſiſtent with God's Goodneſs to make any thing that is not abſolutely perfect, to make rational Creatures for inſtance, capable of doing amiſs? The Queſtion I ſay comes to this, or elſe there is nothing in it: For if God may make Creatures not abſolutely perfect, but capable of ſinning, there is no greater Objection againſt putting the Trial of their Vertue upon their natural Appetites, than upon any other Weakneſs or Infirmity: And ſome Infirmity there muſt be in every Creature capable of offending, and thereby capable of a Trial. Had we no Deſires that could incline us to do amiſs,

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we ſhould be above a State of Trial: And if it is lawful to indulge all our Deſires upon this Pretence, that they are natural, it is evident we cannot do amiſs in following our Deſires; and conſequently we are not in a State of Trial. What hitherto we have called Temptations to ſin, are in Truth Juſtifications of it; for Temptations act upon our Deſires, and our Deſires cannot lead us wrong: And if ſo, every baſe Action is juſtified by the Temptation that produces it: And no Man can ſin but when he is forced to do ſomething againſt his Inclination. This Plea, drawn from natural Deſires, is, I know, made uſe of to juſtify one Kind of Wickedneſs particularly: But ſurely this is very partial Dealing; for I ſee no Reaſon why Pride, Ambition, and Avarice ſhould be excluded the Benefit of it. Have Pride, Ambition, and Avarice no Deſires? or are they all unnatural? It would be well for the World if they were, but the Caſe is otherwiſe: Mankind are of a Nature ſubject to theſe Deſires as well as others; and upon the Foot of this Plea we may make Saints, as well as Heroes, of all the great Diſturbers of the World.

To conclude: The Deſires of Nature are ordained to ſerve the Ends of Nature:

Reaſon

Reaſon is given to Man to govern the lower Appetites, and to keep them within their proper Bounds: In this conſiſts the Vertue of Man: This is the Trial to which he is called; and the Prize contended for is nothing leſs than Immortality. If we indulge ourſelves to the utmoſt in this World, our Enjoyments muſt be very ſhort lived, ſince we are ourſelves but of a ſhort Continuance on Earth; but the next Scene that opens will preſent us with a State that never changes, either happy or miſerable, according as we behave here. In this World we have little Intereſt, no abiding Place; and ought therefore to paſs through it with the Indifference of Travellers, whoſe Affections are placed on their native Country. This is the View the Apoſtle had before him in giving the Exhortation contained in the Text, *Dearly beloved, I beſeech you as Strangers and Pilgrims abſtain from fleſhly Luſts, which war againſt the Soul.*

DISCOURSE IX.

PART II.

THE Apoſtle in the Text enforces his Exhortation to *abſtain from fleſhly Luſts* by two Conſiderations, which yet are near allied to each other. He calls upon us to remember that we are Strangers and Pilgrims here on Earth, and conſequently that we have a better and a dearer Intereſt in another Country, which ought by no Means to be neglected for the Sake of the low and mean Enjoyments which this World affords. Whoever allows the Principle muſt needs allow the Conſequence. If we are related to two Worlds, if this preſent be in all Reſpects inconſiderable, compared to the other, no Reaſon can juſtify or excuſe us in ſacrificing our Intereſt in the

other

other World to the Allurements and Temptations to be met with in this.

This being allowed leads us to an Enquiry worthy of all the Pains we can beſtow on it, How far we may purſue the Pleaſures of this Life, conſiſtently with our Hopes and Expectations of a better. Some Enjoyments there are not below the Care of a wiſe and good Man in this World, though he forgets not that he is related to another: Such are the Pleaſures of the Mind, ariſing from the Exerciſe of Reaſon: Such are, in a lower Degree, the Pleaſures which our Senſes furniſh, whilſt uſed within the Bounds of Temperance, and ſo reſtrained as not to be prejudicial to ourſelves and others. Whenever our Appetites become ſo much too ſtrong for our Reaſon, as to carry us into Offences in either of theſe Reſpects, then it is that our *fleſhly Luſts do war againſt the Soul.* If we violate the Laws of Juſtice and Equity, to make Way for the Gratification of our Paſſions; or if we render ourſelves incapable of diſcharging the Duties of Religion and Morality, ariſing from the Relation we bear to God and Man, we wound our own Souls, and, for the Sake of momentary Pleaſures, expoſe ourſelves to Death eternal.

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It ought to be a ſufficient Argument to Chriſtians, to ſhew them the expreſs Command of the Goſpel againſt Drunkenneſs, Fornication, Adultery, and Vices of the like Nature: For ſince the Command comes from him who has Power to execute his Decrees, and the Penalty of them, upon every Offender; to tranſgreſs ſuch Injunctions ſo given muſt diſcover a Want of Faith, as well as a Want of Virtue. But the Apoſtle in the Text goes further, and exhorts us to *abſtain from fleſhly Luſts*, by laying before us the Reaſon in which the Command to abſtain is founded: Was there no Difference between abſtaining and not abſtaining; was the Man who gives a Looſe to his Paſſions, and indulges them to the utmoſt, in as fair a Way to Happineſs as he who governs and reſtrains them, and bounds them on every Side by the Rules of Juſtice and Equity; the Command to abſtain would be merely arbitrary, and void of any Reaſon to ſupport itſelf. But the Caſe is not ſo: Senſual Enjoyments have a natural Tendency to debaſe the Mind, to render it incapable of diſcharging its proper Functions, and unworthy of the Happineſs to which it is ordained; for *fleſhly Luſts war againſt the Soul:* For which Reaſon we are commanded to ab-

ſtain from them; for which Reaſon we ought to abſtain from them, though the Command had not intervened.

If you conſider wherein the Dignity of Man conſiſts, and what are the Means put into his Hands to make himſelf happy, you will have a clear Proſpect of the ill Effects of ſenſual Luſts, and ſee how truly they war againſt the Soul.

There is no Occaſion to carry you into any abſtracted Speculations upon this Subject; it will be ſufficient to the Purpoſe to make uſe of the Obſervations which Common Senſe will furniſh.

There is no Man ſo little acquainted with himſelf, but that he ſometimes finds a Difference between the Dictates of his Reaſon, and the Cravings of Appetite; between the Things which he would do, and the Things which he knows he ought to do. This Diſcord is the Foundation of the Difference to be obſerved among Men with Regard to their moral Character and Behaviour. When Men give themſelves up to follow their Appetites, and have no higher Aim than the Gratification of their Paſſions, all the Uſe they have of their Reaſon is to adminiſter to their Senſes in contriving Ways and Means to ſatisfy them. Where this is the Caſe,

conſider

conſider what a Figure a Man makes: He has Appetites in common with the Brute Creatures, and is led by them as much as they; only the Reaſon he has enables him to be more brutiſh than they, and to run into greater Exceſſes of Senſuality, than mere natural Appetites, without the Help and Aſſiſtance of Reaſon to contrive for them, can arrive to.

If our Paſſions are to govern us, and the Office of Reaſon is only to be ſubſervient, and to furniſh Means and Opportunities of gratifying the Deſires, it will be very hard to account for the Wiſdom of God in making ſuch a Creature as Man. If we have no higher Purpoſes to ſerve than the Brute Creatures, why have we more Underſtanding than they? We ſee that they do not want more Reaſon than they have to follow their Appetites; they move regularly as they are moved, and purſue conſtantly the Path marked out by Nature. It would be well if we could ſay as much for ſome ſenſual Men; but they are ten times more miſchievous to the World, than they could poſſibly be, if they had only Appetites, and no Reaſon: For Appetites, unaſſiſted by a Power of contriving, could be guilty of no Treachery, no Breach of Truſt; of no

Schemes to over-reach, defraud, and undo Multitudes, and a thouſand other Wickedneſſes, which ſenſual worldly Men are daily guilty of, and will be guilty of, as long as their Reaſon is employed to promote the Ends of their Paſſion. So that, conſidering the Caſe with reſpect to this World only, the ſenſual Man, who gives himſelf to be conducted by his Appetites, is a more miſchievous, a more odious Creature, and a greater Reproach to his Maker, than any of the Brutes; which he may perhaps deſpiſe, but ought indeed to envy, for being irrational.

From hence it is evident in what Manner ſenſual Luſts do war againſt the Soul, conſidered as the Seat of Reaſon, and all the nobler Faculties; in the due Uſe and Improvement of which the Dignity of Man conſiſts. If we look into the Ages paſt, or into the preſent, we ſhall want no Inſtances of the pernicious Effects of Paſſion, aſſiſted by a corrupt and depraved Reaſon. The Miſeries which Men bring upon themſelves and others are derived from this Fountain; and theſe Miſeries, which we provide for ourſelves and others, will be found, upon a fair Computation, to make nine Parts out of ten of all the Evil which the World feels

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and complains of. *From whence come Wars and Fightings among you?* ſays St. *James, Come they not hence, even of your Luſts, which war in your Members?* He might have added to his Catalogue many Iniquities more, and repeated the ſame Queſtion and Anſwer: For, Whence proceed Jealouſies, Suſpicions, the Violations of Friendſhip, the Diſcord and Ruin of private Families? Whence comes Murder, Violence, and Oppreſſion? Are theſe the Works of Reaſon given us by God? No, they are the Works of Senſuality, and of a Reaſon made the Slave of Senſuality. Were all who are given to ſuch Works as theſe to be deprived of their Reaſon, the World about them would be much happier, themſelves more harmleſs, and I think too, not leſs honourable. So effectually do ſenſual Luſts war againſt the Soul, that it would be better for the World, and not worſe for the Senſualiſt, if he had no Soul at all.

But to be more particular. Let us conſider that the only Part of Man, capable of any Improvement, is the Soul: It is little or nothing we can do for the Body, and if we could do more it would be little worth. We cannot add to our Stature, and if we could, where would be the Advantage? The Affections, which

have their Seat in the Body, can yield us no Honour: They are capable of no Improvement; the higher they riſe, the more deſpicable we grow: They can yield us neither Profit nor Credit, but only when we conquer and ſubdue them. If therefore we have any Ambition of being better than we are in any Reſpect, either in this World or in the next, we muſt cultivate the Mind, the only Part of us capable of any Improvement.

The Excellency of a rational Creature conſiſts in Knowledge and Virtue, one the Foundation of the other: Theſe are the Things we ought to labour after: But ſenſual Luſts are great Impediments to our Improvement in either of theſe, and do therefore properly war againſt the Soul.

As to Knowledge, the beſt and moſt uſeful Part of it is the Knowledge of ourſelves, and of the Relation we ſtand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and of the Duties and Obligations ariſing from theſe Conſiderations. Now this Knowledge is ſuch an Enemy to ſenſual Luſts, that a ſenſual Man will be very much indiſpoſed to receive it. It is Self-condemnation to him to admit the Principles of this Knowledge; and therefore his Reaſon, as long as it continues in the Service of his Paſſion, will be employed to diſcredit

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ſuch Knowledge as this, and if poſſible to ſubvert and overthrow the Principles upon which it ſtands. Hence proceed the many Prejudices to be met with in the World againſt the firſt Principles of Natural Religion; the many laboured Arguments to deſtroy the very Diſtinction of Soul and Body, and all Hopes of a future Exiſtence: Such hard Maſters are the Luſts of the Fleſh! They compel the Soul to deny itſelf, to reſign all its Pretenſions to preſent or future Happineſs, in condeſcenſion to the Paſſions and Appetites of the Body. Take out of the Compoſition of a Man the Inclinations to ſenſual Pleaſures, and he muſt needs rejoice to hear of another Life in which he may be for ever happy. If he ſees not ſo much Reaſon as to be ſure of living for ever, yet he will be willing to hope he may, and his Mind will be always open to receive whatever may ſtrengthen and ſupport ſuch Hopes. But the ſenſual Man ſees nothing that ſuch a future State can afford him but Miſery and Deſtruction; therefore he ſhuts his Eyes againſt the Light, and places a Guard over his Mind, to ſecure it from ſuch unwelcome Thoughts. He hopes, he believes, at laſt he comes to demonſtrate, that Souls, and Spirits, and fu-

ture States, are meer idle Dreams, the Inventions either of Fools or of Politicians.

If the Fear of God be in Truth, as in Truth it is, the Beginning of Wiſdom, Senſuality cuts us off from all Hopes of Improvement, conſidered as rational Beings, by choaking the Spring from whence all Wiſdom flows. It ties us down to the World, it materializes the Soul, and makes it incapable of any noble Thoughts or Conceptions worthy itſelf. And thus Men, by following the ſenſual Enjoyments of the World, become carnal in their Minds, as well as in their Bodies; and inſtead of a Reaſon qualifying them to be Servants of God, the higheſt Honour of which a rational Being is capable, they get a low Cunning to ſerve themſelves and the worſt of their own Deſires, which differs but little from the ſtrong Inſtincts to be found in Creatures of a lower Order; but little, I mean, in point of Excellency, though in another Reſpect it differs much. The Creatures anſwer the Ends of their Nature, and are guiltleſs in purſuing their ſeveral Inſtincts; but the ſenſual Man is uſeleſs to himſelf, injurious to the World, and, as far as in him lies, brings a Reproach upon the Hand that made him. For,

Secondly,

Secondly, Virtue and Morality are the diſtinguiſhing Characters of rational Beings; but theſe will always be loſt where the Appetites have Dominion.

In all Caſes where our Thoughts are confined to ourſelves, and we aim at no other End than our own Intereſt or Pleaſure, we act upon a Principle deſtructive of Morality. The Ability we have of extending our Views beyond ourſelves, and conſidering what is fit and proper and reaſonable with regard to others, is the Foundation of Morality. It is not perhaps a total Want of Reaſon that renders Brutes incapable of Morality; but whatever Reaſon they have it is confined to themſelves, and exerciſed only with regard to their own Wants and Deſires, and this renders them immoral Agents. Now every Degree of Senſuality is an Approach to this State: The ſenſual Man labours in the Gratification of his own Paſſions, and has no other End than to ſerve himſelf, nay the worſt Part of himſelf, in all his Actions. This makes him overlook what is due to others, and to caſt behind him all Regards to Juſtice, Equity, and Compaſſion, in the Eagerneſs of obtaining the Object of his Deſires. Hence it is that the covetous Man is apt to defraud all he deals with, to betray the

the Truſt committed to him, and to make a Prey of the Widow and the Orphan unhappily placed under his Protection. Hence it is that the ambitious Man lays all waſte about him, and fills the World with Blood, Violence, and Rapine; ſacrificing his Country, Friends, and Relations to his inordinate Deſire of Power. Hence it is, that the luſtful Man breaks the Bonds of Friendſhip and Hoſpitality, and entails Diſhonour and Reproach upon the Man who loves him beſt; hence it is that he lies in wait to betray unguarded Innocence, and is content, for the Sake of his Paſſion, to bring Shame, Reproach, Remorſe of Conſcience, and all the Evils of Life, upon a Fellow-Creature. It is the Eſſence of Morality to bound the Deſires within the Limits of Reaſon, Juſtice, and Equity. It is not having or exerciſing great Power that makes an ambitious Man; a King may be as virtuous as any of his Subjects; but it is getting and uſing it unjuſtly. It is not much Wealth that denominates a Man covetous, but it is the Method of obtaining and diſpenſing Riches that makes the Difference. And for the other Caſe mentioned, you ſhall have the Reſolution of it in the Words of an Apoſtle, *Marriage is honourable in all Men, and the Bed undefiled*;

filed; but Whoremongers and Adulterers God will judge.

It is plain from theſe Inſtances, that the Virtue of a Man conſiſts in bounding his Deſires, and reſtraining them within the Limits preſcribed by Reaſon and Morality: Theſe Limits the Luſts of the Fleſh are perpetually tranſgreſſing; every ſuch Tranſgreſſion is a Wound to the Soul, which weakens its natural Faculties, and renders it leſs able to diſcharge its proper Office: For Reaſon will not always ſtrive with a Man; but if often ſubdued by corrupt Affections, it will at laſt give over the Conteſt, and grow hard, ſtupid, and void of Feeling.

And this ſuggeſts another Conſideration, to ſhew how effectually ſenſual Luſts do war againſt the Soul, by extinguiſhing the Force of natural Conſcience, and not leaving a Man Reaſon and Religion enough to repent of his Iniquities. The Mind grows ſenſual by Degrees, and loſes all Reliſh for ſerious Thought and Contemplation; it contracts an Hardneſs by long Acquaintance with Sin, and is armed with a brutal Courage which regards neither God nor Man. Age and Infirmities may free us from our ſenſual Paſſions, the Sinner may outlive his Sins, but what is he the better, ſince his Sins perhaps out-

out-lived his Conſcience, and left him without either Will or Power to turn to God? This is no uncommon Caſe: And whenever it is the Caſe, the Circumſtances which ſurround a Man conſpire to make it deſperate. His Mind, by being long immerſed in Senſuality, is unapt for ſerious Reflexion, and indiſpoſed to receive the Truths which Reaſon offers: And beſides this, the little glimmering Lights of Religion, which ſhine but faintly in his Mind, yield no Comfort or Conſolation to him, and he dreads the breaking in of more Light upon him, leſt, by knowing more, he ſhould become more miſerable: This makes him love the Darkneſs in which he is, which helps to ſkreen him from a Senſe of his own Miſery. And thus the ſenſual Man ſpends the poor Remains of Life with very little Senſe, and yet much Fear of Religion. And yet were this the worſt, happy were his Caſe, in compariſon to what it really is: For ſenſual Luſts war againſt the Soul, againſt the very Being itſelf, and will render it for ever unhappy and miſerable.

The ſenſual Man has but one Hope with reſpect to Futurity, and a ſad one it is, That he may die like the Beaſts that periſh: But Nature, Reaſon, Religion, deny him even this

this Comfort, and with one Voice proclaim to us, *That God has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World.* When that Day comes, and he ſhall ſtand before the Throne of God with all his Sins about him, and every injured Perſon ready to accuſe and demand Juſtice againſt him, it is much eaſier to imagine what his Diſtreſs and Miſery will be, than for any Words to deſcribe it. Be the Conſequence of that Day what it will, it muſt be fatal to Sinners. Should the much-talked of, and the more wiſhed-for Annihilation be their Doom, it is a Sentence that deſtroys both Body and Soul; a Sentence ſhocking to Nature, and terrible to all our Apprehenſions; and to which nothing but a guilty Conſcience, and a fearful Expectation of ſomething worſe, could poſſibly reconcile the Sentiments of a Man. But neither will this be the Caſe: There is Fire that ſhall never go out prepared for the Spirits of the Wicked, a Worm that never dies ready to torment them. It may be aſked perhaps, Do you mean a material Fire, and a material Worm? In good Truth I am little concerned to anſwer this Queſtion: There is one who will anſwer it, even he who ſaid it. There is nothing I think ſo weak as the Diſputes about future

Puniſh-

Puniſhments. Do you imagine that God wants Means of puniſhing Sinners, effectually? or do you think that when he comes to puniſh Sin, you ſhall have a ſaving Bargain, and that your preſent Enjoyments will be worth all you can ſuffer for them hereafter? If you imagine this, you muſt think God a very weak Being: But if you think him a wiſe Governor, reſt ſatisfied that there is nothing to be got by offending him; and that it is a fooliſh Encouragement you give yourſelf, in imagining that the Pains of Hell will be leſs tormenting than they are repreſented to be, when you may be ſure from the Power and Wiſdom of God, that the Pleaſures of Sin will be too dearly purchaſed at the Price of them.

But to return to the Argument before us: Let us look back, and take a ſhort View of the ſenſual Man's Condition. In this World his Paſſions find ſo much Employment for his Reaſon, that he is excluded from the Improvements peculiar to a rational Being, and which might recommend him to the Favour of his Maker: With Reſpect to his Fellow-Creatures he is void of Morality; with Reſpect to God he is void of Religion: He has a Body worn out by Sin, and a Mind hardened by it: In his Youth he ſtrives to forget

forget God, in his old Age he cannot remember him: He dies fuller of Sins than of Years, and goes down with Heavineſs to the Grave, and his Iniquities follow him, and will riſe with him again when God calls him to appear and anſwer for himſelf: Then will his Luſts and Appetites, and all the Sins which attended on them, riſe up in Judgment againſt him, and ſink his Soul into everlaſting Miſery. The Sum then of his Account is this: The ſenſual Man has his Portion of Enjoyment in this World with the Brutes, and in the next his Puniſhment with wicked Spirits. This is the War which the Luſts of the Fleſh wage againſt the Soul: From ſuch Enemies a wiſe Man ought to fly, for they have Power not only to deſtroy the Body, but to *caſt both Body and Soul into Hell.*

DISCOURSE X.

MATTHEW xxvii. 38.

Then were there two Thieves crucified with him: one on the right Hand, and another on the left.

WHAT different Effects the Judgments of God have upon the Minds of Men, may be learned from theſe Examples now before us. Here are two Thieves crucified with our bleſſed Saviour; two, who were probably guilty of the ſame Crimes, and now under the ſame Condemnation; both brought by the Providence of God to ſuffer in the Company of his own Son, whoſe Blood was ſhed for the Sins of the whole World. But mark the End of

theſe Men: One died reproaching and blaſpheming Chriſt, and breathed out his Soul in the Agonies of Guilt and Deſpair; the other ſaw, acknowledged, and openly confeſſed his Redeemer, and expired with the Sound of thoſe bleſſed Words in his Ears, *To Day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe.*

How adorable is the Wiſdom of God, who has thus inſtructed us; and, by ſetting the Examples of his Juſtice and Mercy ſo near together, has taught us to fear without Deſpair, and to hope without Preſumption! Who would not tremble for himſelf, when he ſees the Man periſh in his Sins who died by his Saviour's Side; within reach of that Blood which was poured out for his Redemption, but wanting Faith to ſtretch out his Hand, and be ſaved?

What would the dying Sinner give to have his Saviour ſo near him in his laſt Moments, that he might pour out his Soul before him, and ſeize by Violence the Hand which alone is able to ſave? Yet he who had all theſe Advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his Sins, void of Hope and of Comfort.

Muſt the Sinner then deſpair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No. Caſt your Eyes on the other Side of the Croſs, and there you

you may ſee the Mercy of God diſplayed in the brighteſt Colours. There hangs the Penitent, ſurrounded with all the Terrors of approaching Death; yet in the midſt of all calm and ſerene, confeſſing his Sins, glorifying the Juſtice of God in his own Puniſhment, rebuking the Blaſphemy of his Companion, juſtifying the Innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the loweſt State of Miſery; and at laſt receiving the certain Promiſe of a bleſſed Immortality.

Thus the Caſe ſtands with all the Allowances made to it which ſeem moſt to favour a Death-bed Repentance: And yet, as if the Scripture had ſaid nothing of the Wretch who died blaſpheming and reproaching Chriſt, nor given us any Cauſe to fear that a wicked Life may end in an hardened and obdurate Death; the Caſe of the Penitent only is drawn into Example, and ſuch Hopes are built on it, as are neither conſiſtent with the Laws of God, nor the Terms of Man's Salvation; for even of this Example the moſt prepoſterous and abſurd Uſe is made. This Penitent, as ſoon as he came to the Knowledge of Chriſt, repented of his Sins: If you are fond of the Example, *Go and do likewiſe:* If you delay, and purſue the Pleaſures of Sin, upon the Encouragement which

this Inſtance affords you, it is plain, that you like nothing in the Repentance, but only the Lateneſs of it; and that your Inclinations are to imitate the Thief, rather than the penitent Chriſtian. Once he lived by Violence, in defiance of the Laws of God and Man: When he was penitent, he abhorred and deteſted his Iniquities: Which Part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propoſe to enjoy the Pleaſures of Sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the Pleaſures of Heaven, you mightily impoſe on yourſelf; his Caſe can never be yours, and therefore his Example cannot be your Security. Beſides, were the Caſe indeed parallel to that of the dying Chriſtian, yet ſtill it can afford no certain Hope; ſince the Proof is as ſtrong from the Caſe of the impenitent Thief, that you ſhall die in your Sins; as it can be from the other Caſe, that you ſhall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time, to conſider this Caſe diſtinctly in all its Views: I ſhall therefore only briefly hint to you the Circumſtances which diſtinguiſh it from that of the dying Chriſtian; and then proceed to ſhew, what little Hope this Example affords, allowing the Caſe to be what it is generally ſuppoſed to be.

Firſt then; In all this perhaps there may be nothing reſembling a Death-bed Repentance. It is no uncommon thing for Malefactors to lie in Priſon a long time, before they are brought to Trial and Execution; and if that is the preſent Caſe, there is room enough for the Converſion of this Criminal before he came to ſuffer. The Circumſtances incline this Way. How came he to be ſo well acquainted with the Innocence of Chriſt, if he never heard of him till he met him on the Croſs? How came it into his Head to addreſs to him in the manner he does, *Lord, remember me when thou comeſt into thy Kingdom?* What were the Marks of Royalty that were to be diſcovered on the Croſs? What the Signs of Dignity and Power? What could lead him to think that his Fellow-ſufferer had a Title to any Kingdom? what to imagine, that he was Lord of the World that is to come? Theſe Circumſtances make it probable that he had elſewhere learnt the Character and Dignity of Chriſt, and came perſuaded of the Truth of his Miſſion: And what is this to them, who have no Deſire to lie down Chriſtians upon their Death-bed, though they would willingly go off Penitents?

Secondly, Suppoſe this great Work were begun and finiſhed on the Croſs; yet it cannot be drawn into Example by Chriſtian Sinners: Becauſe the Converſion of a Jew or an Heathen is one Thing, and the Repentance of a Chriſtian is another. The Promiſes of God, through Chriſt, are ſo far certain, that whenever an Unbeliever repents and is converted, his Sins ſhall be forgiven. This was the Penitent's Caſe; and therefore the Pardon granted to him anſwers directly to Baptiſmal Regeneration; and has nothing to do with a Death-bed Repentance; nor can at all affect them who have fallen from Grace once received. For,

Thirdly, The profligate Life of this unconverted Sinner was not attended with ſuch aggravating Circumſtances as the Sins of Chriſtians are. He ſinned againſt the Light of Nature, and the common Rules of Reaſon and Morality: But it might at leaſt be ſaid for him, that he was the unhappy Son of an unhappy Father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted State of Nature; that he wanted both the Senſe and Knowledge, the Hopes and Fears, and the Helps and Aſſiſtances, which the Goſpel affords for deſtroying the Power and Dominion of Sin: And

And the greater his Weakneſs was, the fitter Object of Mercy was he; and becauſe he had not been freed by Grace from the Power of Sin, he had the better Plea to be freed by Mercy from Puniſhment. But are there the ſame Excuſes, or the ſame Hopes of Pardon, for Chriſtians, who ſin againſt Knowledge, againſt the powerful Motives of Hope and Fear, and in deſpight of the Holy Spirit, with which they were ſealed? To ſin in hopes of Pardon, and upon the Proſpect of future Repentance, is itſelf a great Aggravation of Sin, and a ſad Abuſe of the Mercy of God.

If the Heathen ſins, he ſins under thoſe Infirmities of Nature for which Chriſt died; but the Chriſtian ſins under the Uſe of all the Remedies which the Goſpel has provided, and which were purchaſed for him by his dying Saviour. The Condition of Mankind after the Fall afforded, without doubt, many Arguments of Pity and Compaſſion; and ſuch Arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their Redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened Sinner has Right to plead all theſe Arguments in his own Behalf: His is the common Cauſe of Mankind; and Nature with unutterable

Groans, cries for him and all her Children before her great Creator.

If the Penitent received the firſt Knowledge of Chriſt upon the Croſs; yet how much more had he to ſay for himſelf, than the Chriſtian, who comes to make his Peace at the Hour of Death? He might thus plead his unhappy Cauſe: "Lord, I am "one of thoſe Sinners, for whom thy Son "now expires upon the Croſs; I was con-"ceived in Sin, and brought forth in Ini-"quity; I have wandered in Ignorance and "Darkneſs, without the Light of thy Goſpel "to direct me, without the Help of thy "Spirit to protect me: Why was all my "Life ſo dark, and theſe few laſt Minutes "only bleſſed with the Knowledge of thy "Son? Lord, accept the poor Remains "of Life, ſince it is all I have left to offer: "My lateſt Breath ſhall confeſs my own "Guilt, and my Saviour's Innocence: And "ſince thy Wiſdom has united me to him "in this Croſs, let me never more part "from him; but as I am joined with him "in his Death, ſo let me be likewiſe in his "Life for evermore." But what ſhall the dying Chriſtian ſay, after an hardened Life of Sin and Impenitence? What Words ſhall we put in his Mouth to appeaſe the Anger

of

of his injured Redeemer? You may ſpend your Time in lamenting your paſt Folly; but with what Language will you approach to God? You have neither Ignorance nor Weakneſs to plead: you were enlightened with his Word; and his Holy Spirit was ever ready to aſſiſt you, had you been ready to endeavour after Holineſs. What will you then ſay, when frightened and amazed you call for Mercy at your laſt Moments? May not the Lord then ſay, "How long have I "waited in vain for theſe Prayers, and theſe "Sighs? how have I ſpoken to you by your "Conſcience within, and by the Miniſtry of "my Word from without; and how have "my Calls been deſpiſed? The Gates of "Mercy were always open to you, but you "ſhut them againſt yourſelf: But tho' you "could fly from the Mercy of God, yet his "Juſtice will overtake you." Conſider but this calmly with yourſelves, and you will find that the wicked Chriſtian's Caſe is ſo much worſe than the Penitent's upon the Croſs, that there can be no Reaſon for you to encourage yourſelves upon this Example; or to hope for the ſame Mercy, when your Caſe will be greatly different. Theſe are ſuch Circumſtances as enter into the Nature of the Caſe, and will make it always unfit,

and

and oftentimes impoſſible, to be imitated by a Chriſtian. But there are other Circumſtances fit to be obſerved, which render a Death-bed Repentance very inſecure and dangerous, tho' we ſhould allow it all the Hopes which have been raiſed from the Caſe before us.

As, firſt; He that ſins in hopes of repenting at laſt, may ſin ſo far, as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of Repentance when the Time comes. This Reflection is grounded upon the Caſe of the impenitent Thief, who was crucified with our Saviour; who, tho' he had certainly all the outward Advantages which the Penitent had, yet he made no Step towards Repentance, but died reproaching Chriſt, and joining with thoſe who crucified him, in that bitter Jeer, *If thou be the Chriſt, come down from the Croſs.* Or, if you want more Evidence, this Example may be backed by many more in our own Time; it being no uncommon Thing to ſee Malefactors die ſtupid and ſenſeleſs, and go out of the World as wickedly as they have lived in it: And what can this be attributed to, but to the Deſertion of God's Holy Spirit, which will not always ſtrive with Sinners, but ſometimes leaves them to periſh in the Hardneſs of their Hearts?

So

So that the Man who ſins in hopes of repenting, can never be ſure of this laſt Retreat; becauſe by purſuing the firſt part of his Deſign, that is, to enjoy the Pleaſure of Sin, he may ſoon grow incapable of the laſt, which is repenting. I queſtion not but that thoſe who reſerve themſelves to theſe laſt Hopes of repenting, mean ſincerely to do it when the Time comes; for hardly can I think that any Man means to ſuffer for his Sins: but then thoſe who enter upon Sin with theſe tender Regards to their own Souls, ſoon grow above ſuch mean Thoughts, and would ſcorn to own themſelves in the Number of thoſe who are Candidates for Repentance: they contract a Familiarity with Sin, and, with *Solomon*'s Fools, learn to *make a Mock of it*, till by Degrees their Conſciences are hardened, and not to be touched by thoſe ſoft Impreſſions which at the firſt ſetting out they felt from the languiſhing Remains of Grace. And from hence it comes to paſs, that when theſe Sinners lie down upon a ſick Bed, they often want both the Will and the Power to aſk Forgiveneſs; and, by an habitual Neglect of all Parts of Religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor Hopes are concluded, to repent of, and aſk Pardon for; their

their Sins. Nor is it in your own Power to ſin to what Degree you pleaſe, or to preſerve a Senſe of Religion, amidſt the Pleaſures of Iniquity: If it were, poſſibly the Danger in this Reſpect might be leſs: But Habits grow inſenſibly; there is a kind of Mechaniſm in it, as in the Growth of the Body, and he that gives himſelf up to Sin can no more reſolve how great a Sinner he will be, than he that is born a Man can reſolve how tall, or how ſhort, of Stature he will be. To the Truth of this Experience daily witneſſes: Happy are thoſe who want this fatal Experience! With how much Pain and Uneaſineſs do Men bring themſelves to do the Things, which in a little Time they glory, and take pride in, or at leaſt grow eaſy and contented under? And thus the Man, who with great Tremblings of Heart, and Miſgivings of Mind, brings himſelf to taſte the Pleaſures of Sin, with Reſolutions of an after Repentance, comes at laſt to be ſo well reconciled to his Sins, as not to think Repentance neceſſary for them. The Moment you give yourſelf up to Sin, you give yourſelf out of your own Power; you lay the Chains upon the Neck of Reaſon, and ſet the Paſſions free: Conſcience, which uſed to be your Advance-Guard, and give you

you early Notice of every approaching Evil, falls into the Power of Luſt and Affection: And when Reaſon and Conſcience are deſtroyed, the triple Cord is broken, and Religion muſt ſoon follow after; and how, in this general Rout, one poor Reſolution, to repent of all this Iniquity, ſhould eſcape, is more than can be eaſily conceived: and yet when you loſe that, you loſe yourſelf; it is your laſt, your only Hope. Upon the whole, there is much more Reaſon to fear, that Sin, if once you indulge it, ſhould get the better of, and deſtroy, your Reſolution of Repentance, than that your Reſolution to repent ſhould ever conquer and deſtroy the confirmed Powers and Habits of Sin. And I wiſh thoſe who have not yet put it out of their own Power to reaſon calmly upon theſe Things, would enter into this Debate with their own Hearts, and conſider what Danger they are in: A few Moments cannot be too much to ſpend in ſo weighty an Affair; and whenever you retire to theſe cool Thoughts, may the Father of Mercies influence thoſe Moments of your Life, upon which all Eternity depends!

But, ſecondly, Could you preſerve your Reſolutions of Repentance, yet ſtill it is not in your own Power to ſecure an Opportunity

to execute them. The Thief upon the Croſs died a violent Death, by the Hand of Juſtice; happy in this at leaſt, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himſelf with the Hopes of many Years to come. He had no Pretence to defer his Repentance, in Proſpect of a further Opportunity; nor was his Heart to be allured by the ſoft and entertaining Pleaſures of Life, when Life itſelf was ſo near expiring. From the like Death God defend us all! and yet, without it, which of us can hope for ſuch favourable Circumſtances for Repentance? Whenever the Sinner thinks of Repentance, he will find that he has a Work of great Sorrow and Trouble upon his Hands; and this will make him unwilling to ſet about it. No Man is ſo old but that he thinks he may laſt out one Year more: And then, Why will not To-morrow ſerve for Repentance as well as To-day? And thus the great Work is delayed till Sickneſs or natural Infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the Sight of this ſtrange Deluſion in which Men live, ſtill promiſing themſelves longer Life, and upon thoſe Hopes deferring the neceſſary Work of Eternity, which made the Holy Pſalmiſt break forth into that moving

Pe-

Petition: *So teach us to number our Days, that we may apply our Hearts unto Wiſdom.* The Way that Men generally number their Days, can produce nothing but Folly and Wickedneſs: The many Years to come, which they rejoice in, ſerve only to make them careleſs and negligent, and thoughtleſs of the great Concerns of Immortality: And whether Men are not deluded by theſe Hopes, let any one judge. Do but ſuppoſe that you were in the Thief's Caſe, and certainly to die upon a fixed Day: Do you not think that you ſhould have other Thoughts, other Concerns about you? Could you then delay your Repentance, and ſay, To-morrow will be Time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this Reaſon, that you think you have Time enough in Reſerve to do this Work hereafter. And ſo you may continue to think with as much Reaſon, as you do now, till Death, or the Sickneſs which leads to it, ſurprizes you. And hence it comes to paſs that very few, who ſin with Reſolutions of Repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a ſick Bed; becauſe as long as they are in Health, they have always this Anſwer ready, It will be Time enough hereafter. So that the unfortunate End, to which

Juſtice

Juſtice brought this Penitent upon the Croſs, was, with reſpect to his Converſion, an Advantage that few Chriſtians will give themſelves: The Certainty of his Death made his Repentance certain, permitted him no Delays, no vain Excuſes, no flattering Hopes of better Opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, Conſidering that Chriſtians, who propoſe to themſelves this Example of the Thief upon the Croſs, ſeldom repent till they are warned by Sickneſs to prepare for Death; they will evidently want another Advantage, which this Penitent had. His Death not being the Effect of any bodily Pain, or Diſtemper, but of the Judge's Sentence, he brought with him to the Croſs, which, if you pleaſe, you may call his Death-bed, a ſound Body and Mind. He had his Senſes perfect, his Reaſon freſh and undiſturbed; and was capable of performing ſuch Acts of Faith and Devotion, as were neceſſary to his Repentance and Converſion. But how different often is the Caſe of the ſick and languiſhing Sinner? Perhaps he labours under ſuch acute Pains, as will give him no Reſpite for Thought or Reflection; or perhaps he doſes, and lies ſtupid, without knowing his Friends and Relations, or even himſelf; or perhaps the Diſ-

Diſtemper ſeizes his Head, and he raves and is diſtracted; loſes his Senſe and Reaſon, and every thing of the Man, but the outward Shape, before his Death. And are not theſe hopeful Circumſtances for Repentance? Is a Man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own Brother who ſtands by his Bed-ſide? Theſe are very common Circumſtances, and ſuch as render Repentance impracticable. But ſhould the Sinner eſcape all theſe Accidents, and go off gently without being forſaken by his Senſe or Reaſon; yet ſtill it may happen, and often it does, that his promiſed Repentance produces nothing but Horror and Deſpair. In his Life-time he flattered himſelf with unreaſonable Hopes of Mercy, and now he begins to ſee how unreaſonable they were: Now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the juſt Rewards of Wickedneſs: He ſees him already clothed with Wrath and Majeſty; and forms within his own tormented Breaſt the whole Proceſs of the laſt Day. If he ſleeps, he dreams of Judgment and Miſery; and when he wakes, believes his Dreams forebode his Fate. Thus reſtleſs and uneaſy, thus void of Comfort and Hope, without Confidence to aſk Pardon,

without Faith to receive it, does the wretched Sinner expire, and has the Misfortune to see his Hopes die before him. In a Word then, put all the favourable Circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the Sinner by the gentlest Decays of Nature to his latter End; give him the fairest and the longest Warning; yet still you give him no Security: If he is not sensible of his Sin and Impenitence, he will die, like the wicked Thief upon the Cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the Thoughts of Judgment: Or if he comes to a Sense, and sees his own Unworthiness, how shall he be preserved from Despair, and such a Dread of his righteous Judge, as will make him neither fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary Degree of Grace can preserve him in a Temper fit for Repentance, free on one Side from Confidence and Presumption, on the other from slavish Fear which casts out Love, which may produce Sorrow, but not Repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual Calls of Grace to Virtue and Holiness, who have rejected the Counsel of God whilst they had Health and Strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary Mercy at last, let any reasonable Man judge.

It cannot be ſuppoſed that God intends to ſave Chriſtians in this Way; which would be at once to evacuate all the Rules and Duties of the Goſpel. Chriſt came to deſtroy Sin and the Works of the Devil; but were Men promiſed Forgiveneſs upon the Account of a few Sighs and Tears at laſt, this would effectually eſtabliſh and confirm the Kingdom of Satan. Tho' God has promiſed Pardon to penitent Sinners, yet his Promiſe muſt be expounded ſo as to be conſiſtent with his Deſign in ſending Chriſt into the World; and then it can never be extended to thoſe, who uſe the Goſpel as a Protection to Wickedneſs, and ſin becauſe God has promiſed to be merciful. In a Word, you have the Promiſes of the Goſpel ſet before you, you have the Mercies of God in Chriſt offered to you; if you will accept them, and do your Part, happy are you: But if you are for finding out new Ways to Salvation, if you ſeek to reconcile the Pleaſures and Profits of Sin with the Hopes of the Goſpel, you do but deceive yourſelves; for *God is not mocked*, nor will he regard thoſe who make ſuch perverſe Uſe of his Mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own Souls ſeek the Lord whilſt haply he may be found; and work for

their Salvation whilſt they have the Light; *for the Night cometh, when no Man can work.* The Night cometh on apace, and brings with it a Change which every Mortal muſt undergo. Then ſhall we be forſaken of all our Pleaſures and Enjoyments, and deſerted by thoſe gay Thoughts which now ſupport our fooliſh Hearts againſt the Fears of Religion. The Time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its Coming! when we muſt ſtand before the Judgment-Seat of Chriſt; when the Higheſt and the Loweſt ſhall be placed on the ſame Level, expecting a new Diſtribution of Honours and Rewards. In that Day the ſtouteſt Heart will tremble, and the Countenance of the proudeſt Man will fall in the Preſence of his injured Lord. I ſpeak not to you the Suggeſtion of Superſtition or Fear, but the Words of Soberneſs and of Truth. May they ſink into your Hearts, and yield you the Fruits of ſpiritual Joy and Comfort here, and of Glory and Immortality hereafter!

DISCOURSE XI.

PART I.

PSALM lxxvii. 9, 10.

Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath he in Anger ſhut up his tender Mercies?
And I ſaid, This is my Infirmity; but I will remember the Years of the right Hand of the Moſt High.

WHOEVER was the Author of this Pſalm, he was manifeſtly under a great Dejection of Mind when he penned it: He ſpeaks of himſelf as deſerted of God, and given up to be a Prey to the Sorrows of his own diſturbed tormented Heart, *His Soul refuſed Comfort*, as he complains in the ſecond Verſe: *When he remem-*

bered God he was troubled; when he complained, his Spirit was overwhelmed, as he laments in the third Verſe.

What the particular Grief was, which gave riſe to this mournful Complaint, does not appear; but whatever it was, the Sting of it lay in this, That the Pſalmiſt apprehended himſelf to be forſaken of God: And without Doubt this is of all Afflictions the moſt afflicting, the moſt inſupportable; a Grief it is, which no Medicine can reach, which all the Powers of Reaſon can hardly aſſiſt, for *the Soul refuſes to be comforted.*

Theſe Fears, theſe Sorrows, belong not to the Vicious and Profligate, who *have not God in all their Thoughts:* They live without Reflection, and therefore without Concern; and can be extremely diverted with hearing or ſeeing what modeſt and humble Sinners ſuffer from a Senſe of Religion: But, bold and fearleſs as ſuch Men are, their Day of Fear is not far off, it draws near apace; and, when it comes, will convince them of the Truth of the wiſe Preacher's Obſervation; *The Heart of the Wiſe is in the Houſe of Mourning, but the Heart of Fools is in the Houſe of Mirth.*

There is a very great Difference between the Miſgivings and Miſapprehenſions of a religious

religious Mind, and the Fear to which Sinners are always expoſed, and which oftentimes they experience. The Fears of the Religious are frequently ill-grounded, and ariſe from their not rightly conſidering and underſtanding their own Caſe, or the Methods of God's Providence in relation to this World: But the Sinner's Fear is never ill-grounded; for if the profligate Sinner has not Reaſon to fear God, there can be no ſuch Thing as a reaſonable Fear in the World. The religious Man may fear in the Hours of his Weakneſs and Infirmity; the Sinner can only fear when he comes to his right Reaſon, and a due Senſe of his Condition.

This Obſervation will ſerve to diſtinguiſh between the Fears to which the Religious are ſubject, and which the Text leads us to conſider; and the Fears of Guilt, which are foreign to our preſent Purpoſe, and to be treated in quite a different Manner.

That the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of the Sorrows of a religious well-diſpoſed Heart is manifeſt from the Deſcription he gives of his Conduct and Behaviour under his Diſtreſs: He was ſorely troubled, but *in the Day of his Trouble he ſought the Lord* (Verſe 2.) He was afflicted, but in his Affliction he *remem-*

bered God (Verſe 3.) Whatever Doubts he entertained as to his own Condition, and the Favour of God towards him, yet of the Being, the Power, and Wiſdom of God he never doubted. This Faith, which in his utmoſt Extremity he held faſt, proved to be his Sheet-Anchor, and ſaved him from the Shipwreck which the Storms and Tempeſts raiſed in his own Breaſt ſeemed to threaten.

It is worth our while to obſerve the Train of Thought which this afflicted good Man purſued, and what were the Reflexions in which he reſted at laſt, as his beſt and only Comfort and Support.

Whether the Calamities which afflicted him were private to himſelf, or public to his People and Country; yet as long as his Thoughts dwelt on them, and led him into Expoſtulations with God for the Severity of his Judgments, he found no Eaſe or Relief. A weak Man cannot rightly judge of the Actions even of a Man wiſer than himſelf, of whoſe Views and Deſigns he is not Maſter; much leſs can any Man judge of the Ways of God, to whoſe Councils he is not admitted, and to whoſe Secrets he is a Stranger. And tho' it is but too natural for Men, when they conſider the Sins of others,

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to complain for want of Juſtice in the World, and when they conſider their own, of want of Mercy; yet in both Caſes do they act weakly and inconſiſtently, pretending to judge where they want not only Authority to decide, but even Underſtanding ſufficient to try, the Cauſe. The Pſalmiſt complained heavily, *Has God forgotten to be gracious, hath he in Anger ſhut up his tender Mercies?* But what did he get by this Complaint? was he not forced immediately to confeſs the Impropriety and Folly of it? *I ſaid, This is my Infirmity.* He ſaid very rightly: In complaining, he followed the natural Impreſſions of Paſſion and Impatience; in acknowledging the Folly of his Complaint, he ſpoke not only the Language of Grace, but of Senſe and Reaſon.

What muſt we do then? ſince it is Weakneſs to complain, and Folly to judge, of the Methods of God's Providence, what is there left for us to do? and what part muſt we take? Muſt Religion be ſenſeleſs and ſtupid, and ſhut out all Reflexion on the Ways of God? No; one Way there is ſtill left open to us, To truſt, and to depend on God: And a Way it is ſo far from being ſenſeleſs and ſtupid, that in purſuit of it we ſhall ſee

opening

opening before us the nobleſt Views, that Reaſon or Religion can afford.

I am not preſcribing to you a Method of my own, it is the very Method the Pſalmiſt preſcribed to himſelf. *God has not left himſelf without Witneſs*; the great Works of Nature and of Grace proclaim aloud his loving Kindneſs to the Children of Men. If we conſider them attentively, we muſt admire his Power, and adore his Goodneſs: And when we ſee ſuch Power united with ſo much Goodneſs towards us, it is but a natural Step to throw ourſelves upon his Protection; to truſt the Hand that once made us, and has always ſaved us. When I complain, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *It is my Infirmity*, but *I will remember the Years of the Right Hand of the Moſt High. I will remember the Works of the Lord: Surely I will remember thy Wonders of old. I will meditate alſo of all thy Works, and talk of all thy Doings.* Here then was his Comfort, here the Cure of all his Grief: The Scene around him was dark and gloomy; but, dark as it was, it was under the Guidance and Direction of the Hand that had never failed the Faithful, to deliver him out of all his Troubles.

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The Text, and the Occaſion of it, thus explained, lead us to conſider theſe two Propoſitions:

Firſt, That all Complaints againſt Providence proceed from Weakneſs and the Infirmity of human Reaſon.

Secondly, That a ſettled Peace of Mind, with reſpect to God, muſt ariſe from a due Contemplation of the great Works of Providence, which God has laid open to our View for our Conſideration and Inſtruction.

The firſt Propoſition is, That all Complaints againſt Providence proceed from Weakneſs and the Infirmity of human Reaſon. Under this Head are included all the Suſpicions that are apt to riſe in Mens Minds againſt Providence, as well as the formal Complaints brought againſt it. And the firſt of this Sort, which naturally preſents itſelf to the Mind, when we conſider God and ourſelves, is this, That God is too great and too excellent a Being to humble himſelf to behold the Things that are on Earth. This one Miſtake ſeems to have been the Whole of *Epicurus*'s Divinity. He thought it would be endleſs for the Gods to attend to every thing that paſſed on Earth, and to concern themſelves with the Conduct and Behaviour of every particular Man in the

the World: He thought they could not do this without being moved ſometimes to Anger and Reſentment, and ſometimes to the Paſſion of Joy; which he conceived to be equally inconſiſtent with an uniform ſettled State of Happineſs. To make therefore his Gods happy, he removed them from all Government of Men, and left Men to ſhift as they could, without God or Providence, in the World.

The ſame Thought has in all Times been the Refuge of Sinners; their Language has ever been, *How doth God know, and is there Knowledge in the Moſt High?* Perhaps too this Suſpicion has entered into better Minds, broken with Grief and Affliction, and tempted by their Misfortunes to think that God regards not the Things below.

But how different ſoever the Grounds of this Suſpicion may be in one Caſe, and in another, yet in every Caſe it is manifeſtly weak and unreaſonable.

To imagine that it is too much Trouble, or any Trouble, to God to govern the World, and all the Beings in it, is a mere childiſh Conceit; it is talking of God as if God were a Man, and as liable to be fatigued and tired with Multiplicity of Buſineſs as a Man is. How do you know that there is any Thing

tireſome or diſagreeable in much Buſineſs, and in Variety of Employment? It is true, you find it is ſo in yourſelf, and you obſerve it is ſo in others: You may therefore very well conclude, that much Buſineſs is tireſome to Men like yourſelf; but by what Reaſon do you extend this Concluſion to God? unleſs you think he is in this Reſpect like you, and that he has no larger Powers and Abilities than you have.

As it is abſurd to argue from the Powers of Men to the Powers of God, ſo it is likewiſe to argue from the Paſſions of Men to the Affections of the Deity. Men may be grieved and tormented with ſeeing Affairs under their Conduct go wrong, may be overjoyed at ſome unexpected Succeſs; but can this ever be the Caſe of a Being of infinite Power and infinite Wiſdom? Nothing can happen but what he orders or permits, for his Power is over all: Nothing that he orders or permits can be wrong, for his Wiſdom is equal to his Power. What Diſappointments then are there to grieve him? What unexpected Succeſs to tranſport him? You ſee now that this Suſpicion, which ſet out with ſuppoſing God to be ſo great and excellent a Being, that the Affairs of Men were below his Care, concludes with making

ing him ſo like a Man, as not to be able to bear the Fatigue and Vexation of ſo much Buſineſs.

Epicurus and his Followers, who denied God's Government of the World, denied alſo that he made it. So far at leaſt they were conſiſtent; for if they thought it too much Trouble for God to govern the World, they could not conſiſtently put him to the Trouble of making it. But if we turn the Argument, and begin with conſidering the Works of the Creation, and, according to the Inſtruction of the Pſalmiſt, *call to Remembrance thoſe Years of the Right Hand of the Moſt High*; we ſhall from theſe manifeſt and undeniable Works of God be led to juſt Concluſions with reſpect to the Methods of divine Providence, leſs obvious to our Obſervation, in the Government of the World. When we ſhall ſee the Hand of God employed in forming the loweſt, and, in our Eyes, the moſt contemptible Creatures on Earth; ranging and adjuſting all the Parts of the World ſo that there is not a Particle of Matter but what has its proper Place in Subſerviency to the Whole of the Creation; it will be impoſſible for a reaſonable Man to think that God has no Care of this World, which with ſo much Care and

Wiſdom

Wiſdom he created; or that it ſhould be below him to preſerve thoſe Beings, which he did not think it below him to make. But this Conſideration belongs to the ſecond Propoſition, and will meet us again in its proper Place. To proceed then;

Another Reaſon, which ſome have for ſuſpecting that the Affairs of the World are not under the Conduct of Providence, is, That they cannot diſcern any certain Marks of God's interpoſing: On the contrary, they think it evident, that all the inanimate and irrational Parts of the World follow a certain Courſe of Nature invariably; and that Men act with all the Signs of being given up to follow their own Devices, without being either directed or reſtrained by a Superior Power.

That many Men talk and think in this Way there is no doubt. The Scoffers in St. *Peter*'s time ſupported themſelves upon this Obſervation, *That all Things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation*; concluding, that they would go on ſo for ever, and there was nothing beyond this preſent State of Things for which they ought to be concerned.

But in this Way of Reaſoning there are two great Miſtakes.

1. That

1. That the Concluſion is not rightly drawn from the Obſervation, ſuppoſing the Obſervation to be true.

2. Suppoſing the Concluſion to be true, it will not anſwer the Purpoſe intended.

1. That the material World continues to anſwer the Purpoſes for which it was created, is ſurely, when rightly conſidered, the ſtrongeſt Evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the higheſt Wiſdom and Power. Is it any Praiſe to a Workman, or any Proof of his Skill and Ability, that the Houſe of his building is running to Ruin? and that it wants reforming and ſupporting every Year? Surely every Man would chuſe, if he could, to have his Habitation ſecured againſt the Injuries of Time and Accidents. And can we expect leſs of an Houſe, whoſe Builder is God, than that it ſhould continue firm and ſtable, and without Decay, during the Time intended and limited for its Continuance? If all Things therefore continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation; it proves that they were extremely well made at firſt, and have been extremely well preſerved ever ſince: And can this afford to a Man of any Thought or Reflexion an Objection againſt Providence?

It may be ſaid, perhaps, That it is not merely the continuing of the World that is the Objection, but its continuing always in one unwearied Courſe. The Sun riſes and ſets now, juſt as it did three or four thouſand Years ago: And what Sign is there of Wiſdom or Contrivance in doing the ſame Thing over and over again for Ages together? This Obſervation can ariſe only from what we ſee among Men; and, with reſpect to Men, there is Foundation for it: But it is great Weakneſs, and Want of Thought, to transfer this Obſervation to the Works of God. Men are improving daily in Knowledge and Experience, and may have good Reaſon to alter this Year what they did the laſt, the better to ſuit their Pleaſure or Convenience: But can any Man be ſo weak as to think this to be the Caſe of the Almighty? Do you imagine God was young and unexperienced when he made the World, and that he ſees Faults in it now which he did not ſee then? If you do not think this, what Reaſon can you give why the World ſhould not go on now, as it did from the Beginning? If God made it in the beſt Manner at firſt, and without Doubt he did, can there be any juſt Cauſe for Alteration?

But further; Suppoſing the Obſervation true, that the World is now where it was at the Beginning; yet no Concluſion can be drawn from thence as to the future Continuance of the World. For though this Syſtem of Things ſhall keep its appointed Courſe, during the Time determined by God for its Continuance; yet neither can the preſent nor the paſt State of Things enable us in the leaſt Degree to judge when the End will be. And whoever reaſons in this Way, may juſt as well ſay, Such a Man lived in good Health the laſt twenty Years, and therefore he ſhall live in good Health for twenty more. The Argument concludes alike in both Caſes, however the Abſurdity may appear ſhocking only in one.

But ſuppoſing we ſhould allow even the Concluſion to be right, and that the material World may go on without End: What is it to the Purpoſe? Whatever becomes of the World, you can laſt but a little Time. Your Condition hereafter will not depend upon the laſting of the Sun or Moon, or be in the leaſt influenced by it. Let them move on for ever; yet if you in the mean time are to be miſerable, and to ſuffer for your Iniquities, what will you be the better for it? If this World ſhould laſt for ever,

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may there not be other States for the Reception of good and bad Spirits, when ſeparate from the Body? If there may, how is Religion, or the Belief of God's Government in the rational and moral World, at all concerned in this Speculation? And how weak and how abſurd a Thing is it for Men, who know they muſt die, and may die to-day or to-morrow, to harden their Hearts againſt the Belief of Providence, by ſpeculating upon the Durableneſs of Things without themſelves; when their only true Concern is, and ought to be, to know what will become of themſelves, being very ſure that they cannot continue long here? Our Saviour has told us, that in his *Father's Houſe are many Manſions*: This Manſion in which we now live may continue, and yet we may be tranſferred to other Manſions to be happy or miſerable, according as we have behaved ourſelves in this.

Let us conſider now, whether the other Part of the Objection, pointed againſt God's moral Government of the World, has any better Foundation in Reaſon to ſupport it.

The great Irregularity obſervable in human Actions, and the Miſchiefs and Iniquities which abound in the World, have tempted ſome to think that God concerns

not himſelf with the Actions of Men, but has given them up entirely to follow their own Devices.

It is truly and juſtly obſerved, that there is this Difference between the material and rational Parts of the World; That the material World, and the ſeveral Parts of it, act regularly and uniformly, purſuing conſtantly the Ends and Appointments of Nature; whilſt moral Agents act variouſly, and often inconſiſtently, with the great Ends to which they are ordained. But I wonder any Man, capable of making this Obſervation, ſhould not at the ſame time ſee the true Reaſon of it, ſuppoſing both Parts to be under God's Government.

Matter, being capable of no Action of itſelf, muſt neceſſarily follow the Impreſſions it receives: Suppoſing God to govern the World, the material Parts of it muſt follow the immediate Impreſſions of his Hand; and where God is the Mover, can you expect any thing leſs than Order and Regularity, and a conſtant Subſerviency to the great Ends of the Creation? To ſuppoſe therefore the material World to move irregularly and inconſiſtently with the End to be ſerved, would be ſuppoſing God to act irregularly and

and inconſiſtently with the End of his own Creation.

But in the moral World the Caſe is otherwiſe: Men have a Power of acting and chuſing for themſelves; and, were it otherwiſe, they could not be rational or moral Agents. Were God, therefore, to determine the Actions of Men as abſolutely and uncontroulably as he directs the Motions of the material World, Men would be, to all Intents and Purpoſes, as much Parts of the material World as the Trees and Plants which grow in it. And ſuch a Method of Government would deſtroy and overthrow the very End for which rational Agents were created: For, to what Purpoſe was Reaſon and Underſtanding given to Men, but to guide and direct them, and to make them capable of diſcharging the Duties of Religion and Morality? But if the Powers of Reaſon and Underſtanding were to be perpetually over-ruled, to prevent the Irregularities and Miſchiefs which proceed from the free Uſe of them; what would it be but making Men rational and moral Agents by the Law of their Creation, and then putting them under a Government which leaves no room for Reaſon or Morality? Which is ſuch a Part

as no wiſe Man would act, and which no reaſonable Man would aſcribe to God.

Indeed, this very Difference obſervable in the conducting the material and the moral World, is the ſtrongeſt Preſumption that the Whole is under the Direction of the Allwiſe Being. Upon Suppoſition that God governs the World, would you not expect to ſee all Things directed in a Way ſuitable to their Nature, and the End for which they were made? Material Beings require to be abſolutely and uncontroulably directed, for they have no Power to direct themſelves; conſequently their Motions muſt be juſt and regular, or otherwiſe, according to the Wiſdom and Ability of the Director: And if God be that Director, they muſt ever be juſt and regular.

Moral Agents cannot be ſo directed; for it is eſſential to the Nature of a moral Being to act and chuſe for itſelf: And the Actions of ſuch Beings will be wiſe and regular, in Proportion to the Wiſdom of ſuch Beings; where they are weak and infirm, they will oftentimes be very irregular and blameworthy. That Men are weak and infirm wants no Proof; conſequently, there muſt be great Signs of Weakneſs and Imperfection in their moral Behaviour.

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Since then it is evident, *a priori*, that the Government of the World, ſuppoſing it to be under the Government of God, muſt be, what it now appears to be; it can be only Want of Thought and Reflexion which furniſhes Objections, from the preſent State of Things, againſt a Divine Providence.

But farther; though it is neceſſary to leave Men, conſidered as moral Agents, to chuſe and act freely; yet this is far from excluding the Providence of God from interpoſing in human Affairs: The Reaſon is, becauſe this may be done many Ways conſiſtently with the Freedom of Men; and wicked Men may be puniſhed, and good Men rewarded, even in this World, without over-ruling the Wills or Actions of either. A little Reflexion will clear this up to every Man's Mind; and therefore I ſhall ſay no more than is neceſſary to explain my Meaning.

The Power of Life and Death, which is in the Hand of God, is alone ſufficient for conducting the great Affairs of the World. It is natural for Men to die; and when they do die, no body is ſurprized at ſo common an Event; and yet it is evident, that the Well-being of whole Nations often depend upon the Life or Death of a few Men: Let them live, or let them die, no body's Liberty or

Freedom of Action is affected by it; yet the Peace and Security of whole Countries, or the utter Ruin and Deſtruction of them, may depend entirely on the Event.

With reſpect to private Men, and their Happineſs or Miſery here; if we conſider how much every Man's good or ill Fortune in the World depends upon Variety of Accidents, which may happen one Way or other, but muſt happen as God ſhall think proper; it will be eaſy to conceive, that Men may be effectually puniſhed for their Iniquities, or rewarded for their Virtue, by a Train of Things appearing to be natural and common, without the viſible Interpoſition of Providence.

Theſe ſecret Methods do not indeed juſtify the Righteouſneſs of God in the Eyes of Men; nor is it pretended that they are made uſe of for an exact Adminiſtration of Juſtice in every Caſe; but it is ſufficient if they are or may be uſed to all the neceſſary Purpoſes of Government over moral Beings in a State of Probation; which is a very different Thing from the final Adminiſtration of Juſtice. And whatever Inequalities may appear to us in the Diſtribution of Good or Evil in this Life, they cannot ſtand as Objections to God's Government over the World,

World, unleſs you can prove that there will be no Day of Reckoning hereafter: For, ſuppoſing a Future State, it is quite conſiſtent with Divine Juſtice to permit Things to be as we ſee they are now; ſince Juſtice does not ſleep, but waits with Patience to ſee the full Proof of the Righteouſneſs, or Unrighteouſneſs of Men.

When the appointed Time ſhall come for diſſolving this Frame of Things, the material World will have done its Office, and may lye by, till called out by the Creator to ſerve other Uſes: But for the moral World there is another Scene prepared, in which they muſt account for their Conduct and Behaviour in this; and anſwer for the Uſe they made of thoſe great and excellent Gifts of Reaſon and Underſtanding, with which God endowed them.

Lay all theſe Things together, and conſider in one View the whole Scheme of Divine Providence: Then try over again the Miſgivings of Mind, and the Suſpicions you have entertained againſt God's Government of the World, and you will perhaps ſee Reaſon to confeſs your own Weakneſs, and ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is mine own Infirmity.*

DIS-

DISCOURSE XI.

PART II.

THE Suſpicions which incline Men to doubt, whether God does at all concern himſelf in human Affairs, have been conſidered: I ſhall proceed now to conſider the Suſpicions which, conſiſtently with admitting a general Care of Providence over the World, lead Men to fear, That they themſelves are either neglected or unkindly treated by God. This ſeems to have been the Pſalmiſt's own Caſe, and theſe the Fears which poſſeſſed his Mind. Of God's Government of the World he entertained no Doubt; he applied to him in his Trouble and Diſtreſs; but his Grief was, that he found no Return to his Prayers; his Sorrows

continued

continued and encreaſed: *When he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his Spirit was overwhelmed.*

But this good Man, being well grounded in Religion, was able ſo far to get the better of his Doubts and Fears, as to paſs a right Judgment in his own Caſe, and to pronounce of all his Suſpicions, *This is my Infirmity:* And to call to his Aſſiſtance the proper Reflexions which the great Works of Providence adminiſtered for the Support and Confirmation of his Hope and Confidence towards God, *I will remember the Years of the Right Hand of the Moſt High.*

Now it being admitted that God is not regardleſs of the World, but that his Providence is watchful for the Preſervation of the Whole, It may be doubted whether this Care deſcends to Particulars, and regards the Actions and the Well-being of Individuals; which, ſingly conſidered, make but a ſmall Part of the Whole, and whoſe Fortunes, be they good or bad, have very little Influence upon the Well-being of the Whole.

If we conſider this Suſpicion with reſpect to the material World, a little Reflexion will help us to diſcern that it is entirely groundleſs, and built upon the weak Conceit, that it will be too troubleſome to Providence to

attend to the very minute Things of the World. For the minuteſt Parts of Matter follow the Laws of God and Nature as conſtantly and as regularly as the great conſtituent Parts of the World, and work in their proper Sphere as ſtrongly for the Good and Preſervation of the Whole. The Warmth and Comfort which you receive from the Fire in your Chamber, is as much owing to the Laws and Conſtitutions appointed and maintained by God, as the Warmth and Comfort you receive from the Sun: And the Light of a Candle is as truly the Work of God, and as much depending upon his Preſervation and Execution of the Laws of Nature, as the Light of the heavenly Bodies. If any Man thinks otherwiſe, let him try to account for theſe leſſer Phænomena of Nature, and he will find himſelf under the ſame Neceſſity of recurring to the Influence of a ſuperior over-ruling Power, as when he attempts to account for the Motions of the great Bodies in the Firmament.

With reſpect to moral Agents, and God's Government over them, the Caſe is not quite ſo plain: And there is a plain Reaſon why it is not; becauſe moral Agents would not be moral Agents, if they were as regularly moved by an over-ruling Power as material

terial Beings are, and muſt be; ſince they can only act as they are acted, which is the Reaſon why all their Actings are regular and uniform, becauſe the immediate Agent is God.

But with reſpect to particular Men, and the Care of Providence over them, we may conſider that every Man conſiſts of two Parts; one material, which is the Body; another rational, which is the Mind. With reſpect to the material Part, every ſingle Man manifeſtly depends upon the Preſervation and Care of Providence, as manifeſtly as the great Bodies of the World depend on the ſame Care. The Motion of the Heart in a Man no more depends upon his Will, or upon his own Wiſdom, than the Motion of the Moon does. The ſame may be ſaid of all the animal Functions which depend upon involuntary Motions, not under the Influence or Direction of the Will. The Life then of every particular Man, which depends upon theſe animal Functions, depends upon the Preſervation of Providence. And thus far we ſee, that by the ſame Way of Reaſoning, that we conclude God's Government to extend to the Whole of the Creation, his Care and Government extends to individual Men. This being allowed; Can we poſſibly ſuppoſe

poſe that God, who ſhews ſo much Care for Men, as they are material animal Beings, ſhould entirely neglect them, conſidered as moral Agents? This is the very Queſtion which our Saviour aſks in a like Caſe, *Matt.* vi. 26. *Behold*, ſays he, *the Fowls of the Air; for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?* In like manner we ſay, Behold yourſelves as ye are material Beings; do not all the Motions of the Body, on which Life depends, diſcover to you the Hand of God ſupporting and maintaining your Life and Being here? Conſider once more; Are you not, as rational Beings, and moral Agents, much more worthy of his Care? And can he, whoſe Care deſcends to you as Animals, be ſuppoſed to neglect you as moral Agents?

But as ſtrong as this Proof is, by way of Inference and Concluſion, we do not want more direct Proofs of God's Care for Men, as moral Agents. Of this Sort are all the Impreſſions and Intimations which we receive from Nature, that is, from the Hand of our Creator, for our Government and Direction as moral Agents: The Knowledge of the Difference of Good and Evil,

the Power of Conſcience, the Paſſions of Hope and Fear, the Senſe of Honour and of Shame, which are natural to all Men, and may be ſaid to be born with them, are ſo many Proofs of the Care of God for us, conſidered as moral Agents: And they are not the leſs ſo, for being common to all Men; though poſſibly they have, for that Reaſon, been leſs conſidered in this Light.

Was God to ſpeak directly to every Man, and teach him his Duty, was he viſibly to rebuke every Sinner, you would not doubt of his Care for particular moral Agents; but you might doubt, perhaps with good Reaſon, how conſiſtent ſuch a Method would be with the Freedom which is neceſſary to the Morality of human Actions. But now, the ſame Care is taken, the ſame Inſtructions, the ſame Admonitions given; with this only Difference, that they are conveyed in a Manner, and a Method, which do not interfere with the Freedom of moral Agents. Conſider a little: When you find that you have a natural Notion of the Difference of Good and Evil, and conſequently of the great Duties of Morality, who then is your Teacher and Inſtructor? What you have from Nature, you have from the Author of Nature; and if your Senſe of moral Good

Good and Evil be indeed natural, you learnt it from God, and from him only. If the Power of Conſcience be natural to a rational Mind, who is it that admoniſhes you when Conſcience flies in your Face? Muſt it not be He, who placed the Power of Conſcience in every rational Mind, to act there as his Deputy, in reſtraining, rebuking, and correcting every Iniquity? When you are moved by a Senſe of Honour to do Things that are vertuous and praiſe-worthy, and encouraged and ſupported by Hope of Reward; when you are reſtrained from Evil by the Senſe of Shame, or deterred by the Fear of Puniſhment; whence have you theſe great Aſſiſtances and Encouragements to Virtue, theſe Guards and Defences againſt Vice? If theſe are natural Paſſions, and undoubtedly they are, it is God who calls you daily by theſe his Meſſengers into the Ways of Honour and Vertue, and warns you to flee from Vice and Iniquity.

Theſe are undeniable Proofs of God's Care for moral Agents; and they reach to every particular Man's Caſe, who has not extinguiſhed the Powers of Conſcience, and the natural Senſe of Honour and Shame.

That the Providence of God over particular Men extends ſtill further, and often

interpoſes to bleſs and proſper the Righteous, to puniſh and confound the Wicked, there can be no Doubt in general, though it is always difficult, and generally preſumptuous, to pretend to judge in particular Inſtances: For the Appearances of Things will not anſwer to the Obſervation; the Wicked being ſometimes ſuffered to triumph in this World, and Vertue left to ſtruggle with many Hardſhips and Diſtreſſes: which is the Caſe of the Pſalmiſt in the Text, complaining that *God had forgotten to be gracious*; and has been, and, in the Reaſon of the Thing, muſt be the Caſe of many righteous Men in every Age.

But this is not the only Difficulty in the Caſe: For when the Wicked ſuffer here as they deſerve, and the Righteous proſper in their Undertakings; yet the Bleſſings on one Side, and the Puniſhments on the other, ſeem to be conveyed by ſuch natural Means, and ſo much to be expected from the common Courſe of Things, that Men ſeldom think of an immediate Interpoſition of Providence, and there are hardly Grounds upon which to prove it. But, to balance this Difficulty, let it be conſidered,

Firſt, That an immediate and viſible Interpoſition of Providence in Behalf of the Righteous,

Righteous, and for the Puniſhment of the Wicked, would interfere with the Freedom of moral Agents, and not leave room for their Trial: And this is a ſufficient Reaſon for not uſing this Method.

Secondly, That this Reaſon excludes only ſuch Methods of rewarding Vertue and puniſhing Vice here, as are inconſiſtent with Freedom of Actions; but does by no Means exclude any Methods not liable to this Objection.

Thirdly, That the natural Courſe of Things being under the Direction of God, it is reaſonable to believe that they are oftentimes diſpoſed for the Benefit of the Righteous, and for the Puniſhment of the Wicked; though ſuch Diſpoſition of Things cannot fall under our Obſervation, every thing appearing to happen according to a natural and ordinary Courſe.

The firſt Propoſition has been already conſidered; and the ſecond is but the immediate Conſequence of it: Of the third there can remain no Doubt with any Man, who believes that the Providence of God has any Concern at all in the Affairs of the World. That whole Nations may ſuffer by unſeaſonable Weather, by Storms and Tempeſts, by Lightning or by Earthquakes, is manifeſt

in Experience: That all theſe Things, whenever they happen, are looked upon as natural Events, is allowed: Admitting then, that theſe Things are under the Government of God, and happen as he thinks fit to direct, the Conſequence is manifeſt, That God can, whenever he pleaſes, puniſh wicked Nations, or reward good ones, by a ſecret Diſpoſition of the Courſe of Nature, without any ſuch Interpoſition as is inconſiſtent with the Method of his Government over rational and moral Beings.

And if this can be done, it is highly reaſonable to think it is done; it being in all its Views agreeable to the Goodneſs and Juſtice of God, and not inconſiſtent with the Government of moral Agents. The Truth of this Obſervation is not confined to the Caſe of Nations only; it is the ſame with reſpect to particular Perſons: There are a thouſand Accidents in Life (ſo we call them) upon which the Fortunes of Men depend: As theſe Things happen one Way or other, a Man is made or undone; and how eaſy muſt it be for the Power that preſides over all theſe Accidents, to determine the Fate of Men, and at the ſame time to eſcape their Obſervation? Though it be unreaſonable, becauſe inconſiſtent with the Methods of the divine Government

Government over Men, to expect from God, that he ſhould openly appear in the Support of good Men; yet it is rational to expect, from his Providence, *that all Things ſhall work together* (which is the Language of Scripture) for the *Good* of thoſe who *love him.*

And this leads to another, and indeed the great Difficulty of the Caſe, which relates to the Sufferings of good Men, and the Suſpicion they are apt to entertain of God's Kindneſs towards them, whilſt they ſuffer under the Weight of his afflicting Hand.

The Complaints of this Sort to be met with in Scripture are of two Sorts: One regards the National Calamities of the Jews; the other, the Sufferings of particular Men.

The firſt made the Subject of the Pſalmiſt's Complaint in the Text; as is probable from the Concluſion of the Pſalm, in which he reckons up the great Things formerly done by God for the Deliverance of his People; and concludes with one of the greateſt, *Thou leddeſt thy People like a Flock, by the Hand of Moſes and Aaron.* His ſeeking Comfort, from a Remembrance of God's great Kindneſſes to *Iſrael*, intimates, that his Sorrow was on account of their Sufferings.

But however the Pſalmiſt might be affected by the Calamities of the People, to whom he was ſo nearly related; yet whoever reads the Hiſtory of this People in their own Books, will hardly think that their Sufferings, as a Nation, ſtand as an Objection to Providence: They were under the higheſt Obligations to Obedience, and the moſt forward to diſobey of any other: And it appears, that as often as they repented of their Iniquity, they were ſaved from ſuch Deſtructions as ſeemed to leave no Hope for their Reſtoration. But the Caſe of ſuffering Nations in general, without conſidering the Merit of any particular Nation, is ſo intricated by a great Variety of Circumſtances, that it is hard to form a diſtinct Judgment. The Iniquity of a Nation is made up of the Iniquities of many; and, it may be preſumed, no Nation was ever ſo bad, but that there were ſome good People in it: Theſe, be they many or few, are involved in the general Ruin, and their Caſe makes a diſtinct Difficulty. Now, though it be ſcarce poſſible for us, who can with no certainty judge of each other, to eſtimate the Vertue and Vice of Nations, ſo as to ſay when they are ripe for Deſtruction, yet there are ſome general Obſervations, which lye within our reach,

reach, that will help to juſtify the Providence of God in this Part of divine Government, and ſilence Complaints on this Head.

Firſt, There is a natural Tendency in Vice and Immorality to weaken and deſtroy Nations and Governments; and, that it ſhould be ſo, is agreeable, in general, to the Notion we have of God's Juſtice and Goodneſs.

Secondly, It is alſo agreeable to our Senſe of Juſtice and Goodneſs, that Nations, quite degenerate and corrupted, ſhould not be ſuffered to continue and proſper, and to ſpread their Vice and Iniquity by means of their Power and Authority.

Thirdly, Theſe Principles allowed, the whole Difficulty lyes in the Application of them to particular Caſes; which Application to particular Caſes depending upon Circumſtances which we cannot poſſibly know, the Objection ariſes, not from the Reaſon of the Caſe, but merely from our Ignorance of it: And where is the Wonder, that there ſhould be many Things in the Adminiſtration of divine Government, the Reaſons of which we cannot comprehend? The general Method of Providence, in exalting vertuous and ſober Nations, in humbling the proud and profligate, is confeſſedly agreeable to Juſtice; and no Man can complain

of it.' There is no room therefore for any Complaint at all, but when theſe Rules of Juſtice are miſapplied; and it is not only Weakneſs, but great Preſumption, to ſay theſe Rules are in any Caſe tranſgreſſed, becauſe it is a Point in which human Reaſon cannot judge. Whoever therefore enters into this Complaint, may certainly ſay with the Pſalmiſt, *It is my Infirmity.*

The Miſeries of which good Men have a Share in all public Calamities will fall under the next Head, which relates to the private and particular Sufferings of good Men.

Theſe Complaints muſt be conſidered as made by others, in behalf of thoſe who ſuffer; or, as made by the Sufferers themſelves. When others make this Complaint in behalf of the Sufferers, they evidently aſſume a Fact for which they can have no Proof, That the Sufferers are innocent righteous Perſons: And, therefore, it is great Weakneſs and Infirmity in them to complain againſt Providence, upon Suppoſition of a Fact, of which they cannot poſſibly judge.

The Characters of Men, in the Eye of the World, depend upon their outward Behaviour; and when Men behave ſo as to deſerve a good Character, it is great Want of Candour and Charity to ſuſpect them of Evil;

To

To treat them as deſerving ill, would be a direct Violation of common Juſtice: For ſince we have no Way of judging Men but by their outward Conduct, to treat thoſe ill who appear to us to deſerve well, is acting againſt the only Rule we have to direct us in the Adminiſtration of Juſtice. But, when we judge of God's dealing with Men, and call him to account for his Juſtice, this Rule, by which we are bound to judge and direct ourſelves, is a very unſafe one to follow, and may eaſily miſguide us: The Reaſon is, becauſe, though we muſt take Men's Characters from the only Rule we have to go by, their external Behaviour, yet their true and real Character, as to Vertue and Vice, is determinable only by their inward Principles and Sentiments, which are known to God alone, *who ſearcheth the Hearts and Reins.* To judge Men to be wicked, becauſe we ſee they are miſerable, would be acting without Charity towards Men: To judge them to be innocent, and therefore unjuſtly treated when they ſuffer, would be acting with great Preſumption towards God. From which two Conſiderations, the Rule of our Duty in theſe Caſes muſt appear to be this, To treat Men as they appear to us to deſerve, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate

fortunate in the World; and forbear all Cenſures upon Divine Providence, which acts by Rules of the higheſt Juſtice, though undiſcoverable by us in particular Caſes.

But further, The Man who ſuffers may be what you take him to be, a very good Man; and yet his Sufferings no juſt Occaſion for any Complaint on his Behalf. One good Man ſaw this, and confeſſed it in his own Caſe, *It is good for me that I was afflicted. Before I was in Trouble I went aſtray.* Even good Men in this Life want ſometimes Admonitions to awaken their Care, ſometimes Trials to perfect their Faith. And unleſs you can judge certainly (which moſt certainly you cannot do) of the End and Purpoſes of Providence in permitting a good Man to ſuffer, you can never, with any Pretence of Reaſon, paſs Judgment upon the Ways of God.

As this is true, with reſpect to the temporary Sufferings of the Righteous; ſo is it likewiſe true, even when the Righteous are given up to Deſtruction in this World, and periſh, in the Eyes of the World, miſerably. Conſider the Caſe of all the Martyrs who have died for the Teſtimony of God's Truth: Do you eſteem them as good Men given up by God, without Mercy, to ſundry Kinds

of

of cruel Death? If you do not, it is evident, that good Men may ſuffer, even to Death, without any juſt Reflexion upon the Goodneſs of God.

The Truth of the Caſe is this; Since all Men muſt die, in the Time and Manner of Death the Difference cannot be great: And how hard ſoever it may be to reconcile ourſelves to Death, to unnatural and violent Death eſpecially; yet, upon the ſtricteſt Scrutiny of Reaſon, it can be no Loſs to a good Man, if there be any Truth in Religion, to be removed at any Time out of this World into a better. And this will account for the Caſe of the Righteous, ſuppoſed to ſuffer in the Deſtruction of a wicked Nation: They fall indeed like other Men; but they fall into the Hands of God, who knows how to diſtinguiſh their Caſe, and to compenſate all their Miſeries. I am not recommending theſe kind of Sufferings to your liking, or trying to reconcile your natural Sentiments to them: This only I contend for, That, upon Principles of Reaſon and Religion, no Objection can lye againſt divine Providence on their Account. But to proceed:

When the Sufferer complains in his own Behalf, where is the Man who will venture

to

to put his Complaint into this Form, That a righteous Man is ſuffering unjuſtly? We pray daily to God *not to enter into Judgment with us*; and, I think, no Man will care to begin, and enter into Judgment with God: Before he does, he muſt ſatisfy himſelf in theſe Particulars, That he has been guilty of no Offence to deſerve the Puniſhment of Sufferings, That he is ſo perfect, as not to want the Admonition of them, That he is ſo approved, as to want no Trial.

Whoever can come to think of himſelf in this Manner, will not ſay of his own Complaint, *It is my Infirmity*; but if the reſt of the World ſay no worſe of him, they will deal very tenderly by him.

I have now gone through the general Caſes which fall under my Subject: As to the Suſpicions about Providence, and the Care of God over us, which have in them a Mixture of religious Melancholy, they are of another Conſideration. They are indeed great Infirmities, often they are great bodily Infirmities, and deſerve all the Compaſſion and Aſſiſtance that can be given. But theſe Diſorders do not uſually break out into Objections againſt Providence, but rather turn upon

upon the Sufferers themſelves, who are apter to judge hardly of themſelves than of God; and if they deſpair of Mercy, it is becauſe they think themſelves unworthy of it. They belong not therefore to the preſent Subject.

To conclude: You ſee how dangerous it is to ſit in Judgment upon God, and to cenſure the Methods of his Government: In every Government particular Caſes have their particular Reaſons: Thoſe who know the Reaſons and Circumſtances of each Caſe, may know whether the general Rules of Juſtice and Equity are properly applied in the Judgment and Determination of the Caſe. Others cannot poſſibly judge, though, perhaps, in the general Rules of Juſtice, they may be well ſkilled. If this be true in human Government, it muſt needs hold more ſtrongly in the Government of God. One Man may ſee what another Man can ſee, and therefore may be capable of judging when he does right or wrong: But no Man can ſee all that God ſees, and therefore no Man is qualified to paſs Judgment on particular Acts of Providence, which depend on Circumſtances out of the Reach of human Eyes. The great Works of God, which are before us, if duly attended to,

declare

declare his Wiſdom, Goodneſs and Power; and the Voice of Nature, in all her Works, ſpeaks in the Language of the wiſe King, *Truſt in the Lord with all thine Heart, and lean not to thine own Underſtanding.* Happy are they who liſten to this ſtill Voice! they will act not only the ſafeſt, but the moſt rational Part; whilſt others, full of themſelves and their own Wiſdom, are daily condemning what they do not underſtand: And if ever they recover their right Reaſon, the firſt Step muſt be to ſee their Weakneſs, and to join with the Pſalmiſt in his humble Confeſſion, *It is my own Infirmity.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XII.

PSALM XCIV. 19.

In the Multitude of my Thoughts within me, thy Comforts delight my Soul.

The old Tranſlation renders it thus:

In the Multitude of the Sorrows that I had in my Heart, thy Comforts have refreſhed my Soul.

THESE Verſions, as they both very well expreſs the Senſe of the Original, ſo they give Light to each other. *The Multitude of Sorrows*, mentioned in one Tranſlation, muſt be the Sorrows, in ſome Sort, peculiar to the Men of Thought and Reflection; ſince in the other they are called, *The Multitude of Thoughts*. That there are ſuch

ſuch Sorrows we learn from one who was himſelf a Man of great Thought, *In much Wiſdom*, ſays the Preacher, *is much Grief; and he that increaſeth Knowledge increaſeth Sorrow.* If we follow the Train of Thought which he has marked out, and view the Life of Man under all the various Circumſtances incident to it, every Step we take will yield a Proof of his Propoſition, every Diſcovery will bring its Torment, when we find, *That all the Days of Man are Sorrows, and his Travel Grief; yea, his Heart taketh not Reſt in the Night.*

But there is no End of ſuch Inquiries; and indeed not much Reaſon for them: We may ſit ſtill, and our own Experience will bring this Knowledge home to us, without giving us the Trouble of looking abroad into the World to find it. Cares and Anxieties will make their Way to us, though our Doors are guarded within and without. We need only have common Underſtanding to ſee the Evil that is in the World; and we muſt want common Senſe, if we feel no Share of it ourſelves.

The Diſtemper then is plain: But who is he that can cure it? Who can adminiſter a Remedy ſufficient to the Evil, and give Eaſe to an Heart oppreſſed with Sorrows, and weighed

weighed down with a Multitude of tormenting Thoughts? To find a Cure for the Evils of Life has employed the Thoughts of the wiſeſt Men in all Ages; and the Employment was worthy of all their Care: But yet the World is where it was, nothing happier for their Enquiries; ſtill complaining, ſtill calling out for Help, and finding none. Some bid us lay hold of the good Things of the World, and open our Hearts to the Pleaſures of Life. Wholeſome Advice! but where are the good Things to be purchaſed, the Uſe of which they preſcribe? What Merchant can furniſh us with ſincere Pleaſures, and Eaſe of Mind which knows no Grief? Others bid us be above Pain and Sorrow, and call ſtrongly upon our Reaſon to reject theſe Phantoms of the Imagination, which can have no Effect upon a wiſe Man. An hard Leſſon! For, though the Maſter may forget common Senſe whilſt he is teaching, yet the Scholar will find it hard to forget it when it comes to feeling. What muſt we do then? Muſt we give ourſelves up to Deſpair, and as a Prey to the Calamities of Life? No: One Remedy there ſtill is, unknown to the Wiſdom of *Greece*, unſought for by the Men of this World, capable of adminiſtering Pleaſure and Delight to our

Minds, amidſt all the Uncertainties and Vexations that ſurround us. What this is, you may learn from the Words of the Text, *Thy Comforts have refreſhed my Soul.*

The plain Meaning of this is, That Religion, or a juſt Senſe of our Relation to God, is the only real and ſolid Support againſt the many Evils of Life: This is our Sheet Anchor; with this, no State of Life is inſupportable, without it, no Condition is tolerable.

Give me leave to examine before you the Truth of this Aſſertion.

Some Evils there are which are natural, which are born with us, and from which no Circumſtances or Condition of Life can ever deliver us. Such is the Fear of Death: It is a Fear common to Young and Old, to Maſter and Servant, King and Subject: It ariſes with the firſt Dawnings of Reaſon, and continues with us to its laſt Decay: It lives with us when we are poor, and forſakes us not when we are rich: It imbitters the Miſery of the Oppreſſed, and corrupts the Pleaſures of the Mighty. We bring with us into the World ſuch an Averſion to the going out of it, that, to ſpeak in the Language of Scripture, *Through Fear of Death we are all our Life-time ſubject to Bondage.*

Now

Now take Religion out of the Caſe, and diveſt a Man of all Hopes and Confidence in God, and what has he to mitigate or leſſen this Evil? You will aſk perhaps, What has he to fear from Death, if God be out of the Queſtion, and there be no Expectation of a Judgment to come? Is it then ſo eaſy a Thing to reconcile ourſelves to the Proſpect of being nothing? Is it an adequate Cure for the Fear of Death, to be certain that we ſhall dye without Hope, and be no more for ever? Nature, we are ſure, abhors this Proſpect; and if there be in it any Pleaſure, it muſt ariſe from ſome very unnatural Cauſe; and ſo it always does. It is Sin that makes Men afraid of Judgment, and the Fear of Judgment makes them willing to compound to be nothing. But this is not curing the Fear of Death, but it is chuſing Death out of Dread of a much greater Evil: It is flying for Protection to Death to avoid the Terrors of Judgment, as Men leap out of Window when the Houſe is on fire; which is not deſpiſing the Fall, but dreading the Flame. It is not a Remedy which Reaſon would chuſe, but which it cannot tell how to avoid. When we prefer a leſs Evil to a greater, the Nature of Things is not altered by our Choice; the Evil we chuſe continues

to be an Evil, not eligible in itſelf, but only in reſpect of a greater Evil to be avoided. The Man who ſubmits to have a Leg cut off to ſave his Life, does not think the loſing of a Limb to be a deſirable Thing, though he may be willing to part with a Limb to ſave his Life. By the ſame Reaſon, Death does not ceaſe to be a natural Evil, nor does the natural Fear of it vaniſh, when Men hope to dye for ever, rather than come to Judgment. It ſhews, indeed, that they fear Damnation more than Death; but it never can ſhew, that they have not the ſame natural Averſion to Death which others have. This Comfort, therefore, this only Comfort, which Irreligion affords, is indeed no Support at all againſt the natural Fear of Death: If any thing, it is a Support againſt the Fear of Guilt, but no Support againſt the Fear of Death. For, ſuppoſe the Man who believes nothing of the Being of God, to be however a Man of moral Vertue, and clear of all Guilt which may create a Fear of future Judgment, What Comfort have you to give ſuch an one againſt the natural Averſion to Death? Death will deliver him from nothing, and therefore he can have no Hope in it: It will rob him of himſelf, of every thing; and unleſs he be ſo unnatural as to have

have no Regard for himſelf, or any thing elſe, the Proſpect of it muſt be a conſtant Uneaſineſs to him. Will you bid him ſteel his Mind againſt theſe Apprehenſions, and reſolutely caſt all Thoughts of Death behind him? What is this but exhorting him not to exerciſe his Reaſon upon a Subject which, of all others, moſt nearly concerns him? And is this a proper Inſtruction to a reaſonable Creature? It is bidding Men not ſee what is before them; as if Blindneſs were a Security againſt Danger, and Want of Thought a Cure for the natural Evils of human Life: Which, if it be indeed the Caſe, plainly ſhews, that we muſt ceaſe to be Men, and to exerciſe the Faculties of Men, before we can loſe the Senſe of theſe Evils. Such, therefore, as reaſon in this Manner, confeſs themſelves unable to cure the Evils of Life; ſince they are forced to deſtroy the Man to get rid of the Diſtemper; a Practice which muſt prove either the Phyſician to be a Fool, or the Evil to be incurable. Which of the two is the true Caſe, will appear when we conſider, whether Religion affords a proper Remedy againſt this Evil or no.

Since Death is inevitable, this World can afford no Cure for the Apprehenſions of it; nothing on this Side the Grave can calm theſe

Fears of Nature: Riches and Honours are not worth mentioning in this Queſtion; even the Wiſdom of the World, and all the ſolemn Lectures of Philoſophy againſt the Fear of Death, are but like Cordials given to Criminals before Execution, which leſſen their Fears only in Proportion as they weaken their Senſe and Underſtanding. Since then we muſt neceſſarily dye, the Fear of Death can be allayed by nothing but the Hope of living again: If we can have any good Grounds upon which we may entertain this Hope, it is evident what an Alteration it makes in the Caſe: Death is no longer the ſame Thing, it is a Sleep from which we expect to wake to Immortality: It is a Step from a Life of Miſery to a Life of Peace and Pleaſure, attended with no Fears but what are ſwallowed up in the bleſſed Expectation of Eternity. This is the very Hope which Religion affords. The Man who believes in God, and has a Truſt and Confidence in his Power, Wiſdom and Goodneſs, ſees manifold Reaſon to believe, that God made him for better Purpoſes, than to live a few Years upon this Stage in Miſery and Affliction: He cannot ſuppoſe that a Being, of ſuch Excellency of Wiſdom and Goodneſs, ſent him into the World merely to live in perpetual Fears

of

of going out of it again. All the visible Works of Nature are liable to Decay and Dissolution; and in that we are mortal, we are akin to all Things round us: But then, of all the Works of God, Man alone lives in continual Apprehensions of his Dissolution: The material World is void of Sense, and therefore void of Fear; the Brutes have so much Fear of present Danger, as is necessary to their Preservation; but remove from them immediate Danger, and they shew no Signs of the Fear of Death. This Fear therefore which is peculiar to Man, if it serves no Purpose beyond this World, is an additional Misery, which makes the Condition of Man to be worse than that of the Brute which perishes. What shall we say then? That God has made all Things perfect in their Kind, and suited to their natural Enjoyments; and created Man only for Misery and Affliction? God forbid. The Truth is, That the Creatures, made for this World, have such Fears only as are necessary for their Preservation in this World: But Man, ordained to eternal Life, has such Desires of Life, such Fears of Death implanted in him, as are necessary to preserve to him that Immortality to which he is created: These Fears of Death are perpetual Calls to him, to secure to himself

that Life which ſhall never fail; they are conſtant Intimations to him to wean himſelf from this World, which will ſo ſoon fail, and to look out for a more certain abiding Place. This is the Language of God, ſpeaking to us by the Fears and the Hopes of Nature; theſe are the Comforts which refreſh the Soul in the Multitude of Thoughts which diſtract it.

But does not this Hope, you will ſay, bring with it a great Increaſe of Fear? The Man who lives without God, may ſhrink ſometimes at the Thoughts of Death, and the Apprehenſions of falling into nothing: But the Believer has a much greater Terror, even the Terror of Damnation, to alarm every Fear and Suſpicion of his Soul, and to keep him upon a perpetual Rack. He lives in a State of Inſecurity; perfect he is not, but often ſins; and every Sin refreſhes all his Fears, and places the awful Judge, armed with Anger and Vengeance, full in his Sight. Put this into his Scale, and ſee which is the happier Man, he who has only natural Death to fear, or he who fears Damnation alſo.

True it is, there is no Compariſon between the Fear of temporal Death, and of Death eternal: *Fear not them*, ſays our Saviour,

viour, *who can only kill the Body, but fear him who can caſt both Body and Soul into Hell Fire:* A plain Intimation, were any Intimation wanting in ſo plain a Caſe, that there is no Compariſon to be made between the Fears. But then it muſt be conſidered, that the Hopes and Fears of Futurity are not Things of our own Invention; they will not come at our calling, and go at our bidding; for Men hardly fear Death itſelf more naturally, than they do a Judgment to come: And the Difference between a religious Man, and an irreligious Man, does not lye in this, that one fears a future Judgment, and the other fears it not; for, commonly ſpeaking, both fear it, and he the moſt who has leaſt Religion. It is no unuſual Thing for Men to deny God in their Actions, who confeſs him in their Fears and Apprehenſions: And the Bravery of Irreligion conſiſts more in hiding theſe Fears from the World, than in being able to throw them out of the Mind. This being the Caſe, it is very evident, that the natural Fear of Death is very much heightened by the Fears of Futurity; which are very corroding and exaſperating, where there are no Hopes to mitigate and allay them: And this is the irreligious Man's Caſe; he loſes all the Hopes of Futurity by his Irreligion,

ligion, but cannot get rid of the Terrors and Apprehenſions of it. And though the religious Man may often have Reaſon to fear, yet even his Fear is a Symptom of Health, and is working towards the Repentance not to be repented of; *For the Lord is his Refuge, and God is the Strength of his Confidence.*

But ſuppoſe the religious Man to be ſurrounded with the Fears of Futurity, if he has Reaſon for his Fears he muſt blame himſelf, and not his Religion: Religion wants not its Comforts, however, ſome who have a Senſe of Religion may, poſſibly, be too wicked to be capable of any: Be this at it will, certain it is, that the Fear of Death ariſes from Nature, and is common to all; but admits of no Cure, but from the Comforts and Conſolations which Religion adminiſters. But to proceed.

There are many other Evils and Calamities in Life, which prove daily Occaſions of Sorrow and Affliction to us: So many they are, that it would be endleſs to enumerate them: Theſe are ſo conſtantly near us, and do ſo often overtake us, that a wiſe Man would, if it be poſſible, always be provided with a Remedy. In private Life, we ſuffer often unexpectedly in our Fortune, in the Loſs of Acquaintance, Friends and Relations,

tions, and find ourſelves bereaved of thoſe Comforts of Life which were our greateſt Enjoyments; and not only ſo, but given up a Prey to Sorrow and Vexation of Spirit: What ſhall we do in this Caſe? where ſhall we look out for Eaſe? The World has little Pity, and yet leſs Help for ſuch Sufferers: Much leſs Help ſtill has it for thoſe, who are ſeemingly fortunate and proſperous, and live ſurrounded with Plenty and Abundance, but are ſecretly unhappy, reſtleſs and diſſatisfied in their Minds, and utterly void of that inward Peace which is the only Source of Pleaſure. Thouſands there are of this Sort, who poſſeſs all the World can give, and yet have nothing to enjoy. Others, though they have nothing to diſquiet them at preſent, and have all they wiſh for, have yet an Art to torment themſelves, by raiſing ſad Proſpects at a Diſtance, and bringing within their View all the Calamities which a warm Imagination can repreſent. Conſider now upon what Foot you will place human Happineſs: Take the good Things of the World, divide them as you pleaſe, and try how many you can make eaſy. You will ſoon ſee ſome employing your Gifts in the Purchaſe of Vice and Diſtempers; and growing extremely miſerable, by having

theſe

theſe Means of Happineſs put into their Hands. Some you will ſee worn out with the Care and Anxiety of preſerving, others tormented with loſing their Share; ſome reſtleſs and uneaſy, whoſe Minds no outward Fortune can cure; ſome fearful and ſuſpicious, with whom no Peace can dwell; and all perhaps ſecretly diſſatisfied with the proſperous Condition in which you have placed them. If this be the Condition of human Life, and that it is every Day's Experience bears witneſs, we muſt look out for ſomething more ſolid and laſting than this World affords, if ever we mean to be happy in it: We muſt find that Thing, whatever it is, that can preſerve us, in the midſt of Plenty, from being undone by the Allurements and Temptations of the World; that can ſecure our Peace againſt the Caſualties of Fortune, and the Torments which the Diſappointments of the World bring with them; that can ſave us from the Cares and Sollicitudes which attend upon large Poſſeſſions, and give us a Mind capable of reliſhing the good Things before us; eaſy and ſatisfied as to the preſent, ſecure and void of Fear as to the future. And what is this Remedy? and who is he that can ſupply it? He only it is who is the Author of every

good

good and perfect Gift; whom to know and to love, is a perpetual Spring of Joy and Felicity. The Man who enjoys the World under a Senſe of Religion, and of the Power and Goodneſs of God, will ſo uſe the World as not to abuſe it; will look upon the Uncertainties of Life with the Unconcernedneſs of a Man who knows he has a much nobler Poſſeſſion, of which no one can rob him: He will part with his Riches without Torment, he will keep them without Anxiety, and uſe them ſo as to make them a Bleſſing to himſelf and all around him. If the Courſe of the World be diſordered, and threatens the Inhabitants thereof with Calamity and Diſtreſs, he will maintain his inward Peace, knowing that *the Lord is King, be the Earth ever ſo unquiet:* He will look with Pleaſure into all the Scenes of Futurity, being well aſſured, that the World that now is, and the World that is to come, are in the Hands of God. Theſe are the Comforts which, in the Multitude of Sorrows which ſurround us, will refreſh the Soul of a religious Man, whilſt they who forget God are ſpending a wretched Life, in lamenting over the Misfortunes of this World, and are ending it to begin a more wretched Life in the World that is to come.

As

As the Comforts flowing from a true Senſe of Religion, are the only true Support of the Spirit of a Man, in all Circumſtances and Conditions; ſo the Loſs of them is frequently attended with a Miſery, of all others the ſharpeſt, and which the Mind of Man can leaſt bear. We call this Miſery by the Name of Deſpair: A Grief it is, which pierces through the Soul, and racks it in every Part: There are two Sorts of it, One has God for its Object, but God clothed in Anger and Vengeance; it has no Truſt or Confidence in him; it is all Fear and Dread, as living under a Being ſuppoſed to want no Power, and to have no Mercy; or thinking itſelf incapable of all Mercy, as a Veſſel of Wrath, fitted to Deſtruction: The other diſbelieves the Being of God, or his Providence and Care over his Creatures; it ſees the World in Diſorder and Confuſion, the Righteous afflicted, the Wicked in great Proſperity, and haſtily concludes, *that there is no God*, or that he regards none of theſe Things: A Concluſion which either fills our Hearts with all the Pains of deſponding Melancholy, ſeeing ourſelves ſurrounded with innumerable Troubles, and no helping Hand near to lend us Aſſiſtance; or elſe makes them obdurate and *fully ſet to do evil*, ſeeing

ing the Proſperity of the Wicked, and none near to call them to account. Need I now add any thing to ſhew the Wretchedneſs of theſe Conditions? Is it not a miſerable State to live in a World where no Juſtice is to be expected; to ſtruggle not only with the Accidents of Life, but with the Wickedneſs of Men; with the Violence of the Oppreſſor, with the Fraud of the Deceitful, with the Envy of the Malicious, and with the Jealouſies and Suſpicions of all about us? To have all our Hopes and Expectations confined within this narrow Scene of Wickedneſs and Confuſion, and no Power to overrule this Diſorder, no Hand to guide us through this Storm? Is it not ſtill more wretched to live under the conſtant Dread of an incenſed Power; in daily Expectation of the Time ſhortly to come, which will deliver us up to his Wrath; a Wrath which no Repentance can appeaſe, no Tears can ſoften? No Imagination can form to itſelf a Miſery exceeding this.

Theſe are the Sorrows to which we are expoſed, when once we let go our Truſt and Confidence in God, and render ourſelves incapable of his Comforts. As long as we have Hope in God, we ſee our Way through the World, and move within Sight of a ſure Haven

Haven of Reſt and Peace: If the Wicked proſper, we know there is a Day of Account; if the Righteous ſuffer, we know his Reward is not far off: If all Things about us ſeem diſturbed, we know whoſe Word can bring Order out of Confuſion: Whatever our State and Condition are, we poſſeſs our Souls in Patience, and in full Aſſurance that all Things are ſubject to him, who is our God, and our Redeemer.

I ſhall detain you no longer than to lay two Conſequences before you, ariſing from what has been ſaid. Firſt, Since the Evils of Life do ſo neceſſarily force us to have reſort to the Comforts of Religion, being capable of no other Cure or Remedy, it may ſhew us ſome Marks of God's Goodneſs and Care of us, even in his permitting theſe many Evils in the World: They are ſo many Calls to us, to ſearch out and ſecure to ourſelves that real Happineſs to which we are ordained. Had we been made for this World only, it would be impoſſible to imagine a Reaſon, why a Being of infinite Goodneſs ſhould place us in the midſt of ſo many Fears and Sorrows: But as we are formed for a more laſting State than this, and are placed here for our Trial only, it was neceſſary and agreeable to the wiſe Ends of

Providence

Providence to ſurround us on all Sides, with Warnings not to ſet up our Reſt here, but to remember, and with all our Might to labour for the Life that ſhall never periſh. To this End the Evils of the World are very ſubſervient; they are diffuſed through all Conditions of Life, and are Calls to Perſons of all Conditions to remember God in all their Ways, and to keep a ſtedfaſt Eye upon the Things *which God has prepared for thoſe who love him.*

Secondly, Since the Evils of Life cannot be avoided, nor yet be cured without the Helps and Aſſiſtances which Religion alone can afford; let us conſider, what a ſad Choice we make for ourſelves, when we throw from us the Hopes and Comforts which flow from a due Acknowledgment of God. If we have Hope in this Life only, we muſt be miſerable. We are born to Miſery, and we muſt die to be happy. But if we add to the Terrors of Death, by renouncing or forfeiting all Hopes of Futurity; if we corrupt the few Pleaſures of Life by the Fears of Guilt, and give Weight and Sharpneſs to all our other Afflictions, by a fearful looking for of Judgment to come; our Condition, even in this World, will be deplorable, and our Life but one continued

Scene of hopeleſs Miſery. As we value therefore even the Pleaſures of this Life, and our Share in the good Things of the World, which the Providence of God has placed before us, let us keep ourſelves in a Capacity of enjoying them, by holding faſt the Comforts of Religion. Theſe only can give us a true Reliſh of our Pleaſures; theſe only can enable us to bear like Men our Share of Evil and Affliction: Our Hearts will often be diſquieted within us, and we ſhall, *in the Multitude of our Thoughts*, find a Multitude of Sorrows: Let us therefore keep God our Friend, *whoſe Comforts will refreſh our Souls.*

DISCOURSE XIII.

PART I.

PSALM lxxxviii. 15.

While I ſuffer thy Terrors, I am diſtracted.

AS the Comforts which true Religion affords are the only ſure Support againſt the Evils and Calamities of the World, to which every Condition of Life is more or leſs expoſed; ſo the Terrors of Religion, being very grievous in themſelves, excluſive of theſe Comforts, add Weight to all our Miſeries, and are a Burden too heavy for the Spirit of a Man to ſuſtain. But ſurely there is ſomething monſtrous in ſuch Terrors! They come not from Religion by

natural Birth: For it is much eaſier to believe, that all we ſee is Chance and Fortune, and Religion itſelf a vain Thing, than to believe that an all-wiſe all-powerful Being has formed us to be miſerable, and given us a Senſe and Knowledge of himſelf, that we may live in perpetual Terror and Diſtraction. And yet, in fact, this is often the Caſe; we ſee many rendered unhappy by ſuch Fears and Jealouſies: And of all the Fears incident to Man, theſe are the moſt fearful, and give us the quickeſt Senſe of Miſery; they are, what the Pſalmiſt has deſcribed them to be, *Diſtraction.* A Man in this ſad State employs all his Reaſon to his own Deſtruction; he is ſagacious in finding out new Torment for himſelf, and can give a thouſand Reaſons to juſtify his unreaſonable Fears: If you offer a thouſand more for his Comfort and Conſolation, he rejects them all; his Mind is under ſo thick a Cloud, that no Ray of Light can find Admittance. This Evil is the more to be lamented, becauſe Vertue and Innocence are not always a Security againſt it; nay, ſometimes the very Deſire to be better than we are, and to render ourſelves more acceptable to God, makes us think ourſelves to be worſe than we are, and quite out of his Favour. What a wretched

State

State is this! to ſuſtain at once the Burden of the Righteous, and of the Wicked; to deny ourſelves and the World for the Sake of God, and yet to ſuffer under the ſoreſt Evils, which can befall even the Wicked in this Life, the Torments of a diſtracted Mind!

But bad as this Caſe is, it is not always the worſt of the Caſe: For, as to ſuch who ſuffer under theſe Terrors, and yet retain their Integrity, there is this Comfort, which, whether they can receive it now or no, they will one Day find, That however they deal with themſelves, yet God will judge a righteous Judgment; and, for the Sake of their Innocence, deliver them from the Fears of the Guilty. But others there are, who, not able to bear theſe Fears of Religion, in the Haſte they make to run from them, leave Religion itſelf behind them; and imagining that they cannot be good enough to obtain the Rewards of Religion, take effectual Care to be bad enough to deſerve the Puniſhment of it. This is evidently their Condition, who fortify themſelves againſt the Apprehenſions of Futurity by Vice and Intemperance; and ſeem to have no greater Concern upon them in this Life, than to ſecure themſelves from Thought and Re-

ſlexion. This may likewiſe, in ſome Meaſure, be their Caſe, who employ all their Reaſon in hardening their Minds againſt the Senſe of Religion; who ſeem to think it an eaſier Matter to arrive at Peace, by rejecting the Belief of a God, than to come to any reaſonable Terms with him, and to find Comfort and Security under the Apprehenſions of his Power and Majeſty. This irreligious Phrenzy is, of the two, the greateſt; and will, in its Conſequences, be more fatal than the other. A weak Man, who fears God more than he ſhould do, may be worthy of Compaſſion; but the bold Man, who deſpiſes him, has no Reaſon to expect any.

In whatever View we conſider the Effects of theſe Terrors of Religion, they afford us but a melancholy Proſpect: It is a ſad Thing to ſee the Wicked deſperate, or the Righteous in deſpair. Were theſe Terrors the natural Effects of that Fear of God which is the Foundation of all true Religion, Religion itſelf would be Diſtraction, and not the reaſonable Service of a reaſonable Creature; unleſs you can imagine, that he who made us reaſonable Creatures, and diſtinguiſhed us by the nobler Faculties of the Mind, can take pleaſure in ſeeing us loſe our Reaſon and Underſtanding.

But

But ſince theſe Terrors do often aſſume the Shape and Form of Religion, and are almoſt always charged to its Account; it may be ſome Service to true Religion to ſhew the ſeveral Kinds of theſe Terrors, and the real Cauſes of them: And it will be for our common Inſtruction to conſider, at the ſame time, the Vanity of thoſe Remedies which Men often have recourſe to under theſe Evils; and, as far as the Generality of the Caſe will permit, to point out the true Cure for them.

As to the Cauſes and Kinds of theſe Terrors, they may be reduced, I think, to the following Heads: They are ſuch as ariſe, either, firſt, from Uncertainty in Religion; or, ſecondly, from falſe Notions of God, and of the Honour and Worſhip due to him; or, thirdly, from a Conſcience wounded with a Senſe of Guilt; or, laſtly, from ſome accidental Infirmities of Mind or Body.

It is a Matter of Doubt, Whether there be any of human Race ſo abſolutely degenerate, as to be void of all Senſe of Religion: That there are any ſuch has not yet been proved, though the Point has been much laboured: But if any ſuch there be, they are evidently out of the preſent Queſtion: For, whatever Anxieties may reach

Men in ſuch a State of Stupidity, they cannot be aſcribed to Religion, from the Senſe of which the Sufferers are ſuppoſed to be exempted. But many there are whoſe Minds are diſturbed with perpetual Variety of Opinions, and enjoy no more Reſt than a Ship left to the Mercy of the Winds in a tempeſtuous Sea. The Concern which every Man has in the Iſſue of Religion, is too great to be ſubmitted with Indifference to Chance and Uncertainty: For the Queſtion before him is, Whether he muſt dye like the Beaſts that periſh, or riſe again to Immortality; whether he is at Liberty to purſue all his Inclinations here without Controul; or whether he ſtands accountable to a Judgment to come, to be held in his Preſence who is the Lord of Life and Death, and will recompence to every Man the Work which he hath done. If he holds his Mind in Doubt and Suſpenſe, as to this great Event, he diveſts himſelf of all the Hopes and Comforts of Religion, and leaves room for all its Fears and Terrors to take Poſſeſſion of his Heart: For he can have no true Joy in the Proſpect of the Pleaſures of another World, which, for ought he knows, may be all Deluſion; nor can he enjoy the Pleaſures of this World, becauſe of the Fears of

Futurity,

Futurity, which, for ought he knows, may be all real, and approaching him every Day. Every Thought of the Heart, labouring under ſuch Uncertainty, brings Torment and Vexation with it; it renders him incapable of all preſent Joy, and gives no Aſſurance of any to ſucceed. The Man who is to caſt Lots for his Life, is not more reſtleſs and uneaſy under the Expectation of what Chance ſhall determine concerning him, than he is, whoſe Mind is in Suſpenſe in the great Points of Religion; for theſe Points have in them Life and Death eternal, and he lives under a perpetual Expectation of a ſudden Determination of his Fate; ſo that he is all his Life-long caſting Lots for his Life.

The Uneaſineſs of this State is ſuch, that no one can endure it long; and, in Experience it is true, that all haſten to deliver themſelves from theſe Torments one Way or other. Some labour to ſhut out all Thought and Reflexion upon theſe Subjects; they fly to Buſineſs or Pleaſure for Refuge; and becauſe Buſineſs and Pleaſure have their Seaſons of Remiſſion, and leave the Mind its vacant Hours for Conſideration, they are forced to take ſhelter in Vice and Intemperance, as what alone can ſecure from the Interruptions of Thought and Reaſon. Others

reſolving

reſolving to reſcue themſelves from the Perplexities of an unſettled Mind, uſe a kind of Force upon themſelves in determining their Choice, and reſolutely fix upon the Poſt which they will maintain; and thus ſome reject all Religion, and ſome take all, without being able, on either Side, to give a Reaſon for what they do.

But all theſe Methods are but ſo many Arts, by which Men deceive themſelves, and gain a falſe Peace, liable to be diſturbed by new Torments and Anxieties; They build without a Foundation; and, when the Winds and Storms ariſe, their Houſe will fall on their Heads, and cover them in Ruin and Deſtruction. Let the Man who has long ſhut out Thought and Reflexion, and, through the Power of Vice and Intemperance, has arrived at his much deſired State of Stupidity; let him, I ſay, be but awakened out of this Lethargy by ſome uncommon Calamity; or let Sickneſs and Infirmity render him incapable of Vice, and diſcharge thoſe Fetters with which his Mind was bound; and all his Fears will return with double Force; they will appear no longer in the Form of Doubts and Uncertainties, but will come upon him as the Terrors of Guilt armed with Vengeance; and he will ſoon find,

find, that the Method he took to deliver himſelf from the Uncertainties of Religion, has delivered him from nothing but the Hopes and Comforts of it, and bound upon his Soul all its Fears and Terrors without Remedy. So, again, If the Man who is an Unbeliever upon the Strength of his Will, without the Conſent of his Underſtanding, meets with any Shock to diſturb his ill-grounded Peace, his Mind will certainly recoil; and, like a Spring, when the Weight that held it is removed, return to its natural State. Whoever, in theſe great Concerns of Life, determines himſelf without aſking Advice of his Reaſon, and taking the Aſſent of his Mind along with him, will certainly find, ſooner or later, that Reaſon will revenge the Affront, and make him pay dear for neglecting ſo faithful a Counſellor. And, when ſuch Fears and Uncertainties return, the ſecond State is much worſe than the firſt: For now they come attended with a Conſciouſneſs of an obſtinate and reſolute Oppoſition to God, of an Endeavour to harden our Hearts againſt all Senſe of Religion; which, be Religion true or falſe, no Senſe or Reaſon can juſtify.

But what ſhall we ſay of ſuch, who prefer Religion notwithſtanding all their Doubts, who voluntarily ſubmit to the Du-

ties of it, and chuſe even its uncertain Hopes before the preſent Pleaſures of the World? Are not ſuch in a ſafe Way? I truſt in God, many ſuch are: But I muſt remind you, that the Queſtion before us is not, how ſafe they are, but how they are affected by the Fears and Terrors of Religion. And even, as to this Point, the Varieties in this Caſe are ſo many and great, that the ſame Conſiderations will not reach all who are in this Condition. Some there may be who believe the Being of God and his Providence, who ſee the Difference between moral Good and Evil, and own all the Obligations ariſing from thence on rational Beings; but may doubt perhaps, as to their own State after this Life, and whether God intends them for any thing beyond this World; and yet they may think it highly reaſonable and becoming them to worſhip and obey God, as much as others, who have better and greater Expectations from him for themſelves. You have in this Deſcription the very beſt of this Caſe before you; and yet, under theſe Circumſtances, Religion is all Labour, and no Benefit: For no Man can be ſo blind, as to think Religion a ſure Way to worldly Proſperity and Happineſs; and, if it is not ſure of a future Reward,

ward, there is no Security in it. Here is no Remedy in ſuch Religion againſt the natural Fear of Death, to which all are ſubject; no Conſolation againſt the many Evils and Afflictions of Life, from all of which none are free. When we are ſurrounded with Difficulties and Diſtreſs, this Religion ſhews us not the Way to eſcape, but gives us up to our preſent Sufferings, void of better Hopes and Expectations; at leaſt, uncertain of Comfort or Relief. Beſides, how can a Man poſſibly maintain a juſt and true Notion of God, under ſuch a Perſuaſion as this? We are ſure the beſt Men often have a Portion of Miſery in this World; and if we are not perſuaded that there is ſomething better for them in reſerve hereafter, it is impoſſible to juſtify to ourſelves the Goodneſs of God towards the Children of Men: And yet, without this, Religion muſt be all Terror, conſiſting in the Belief of an abſolute Power over us, but a Power not rendered amiable by Goodneſs or Mercy. While Men are eaſy in the World, they may find ſome Satisfaction in ſuch a kind of Belief, and value themſelves perhaps for the Submiſſion they pay to God, without being ſollicitous what ſhall become of themſelves; but Diſtreſs will ſhake them, and the Sor-

rows

rows of the World will prove their Religion to be void of Comfort.

But the worſt of this Caſe is, when Men reſolve to be religious out of Fear, and merely to ſecure themſelves from ſome dreadful Apprehenſions which they have on their Minds; ſuch Religion, as it begins in Fear, ſo it lives perpetually in Fear, and carries with it all its Fears at leaſt as far as the Grave. When Religion ariſes from a juſt Notion of God, and from a right Apprehenſion of what is due from a reaſonable Creature to his reaſonable Maker and Governor, there is Peace and Satisfaction in every Step of it; every Act of Religion carries with it the Approbation of our own Minds, and is followed by a Contentment which nothing can diſturb. But he who is religious, not becauſe he knows it is right for him ſo to be, but becauſe he dreads to be otherwiſe, can never know that he is right in any thing he does, but will naturally fall into all the Methods of Superſtition, which ſome weak ones, and ſome wiſe in this World agree to call Religion. Hence it is, that ſome, who ſeem moſt devoutly diſpoſed, are under a perpetual Uneaſineſs of Mind, and never ſatisfied that they have done any thing as they ought to do. Others,

ſeeing

ſeeing Men of ſuch Application to the Duties of Religion under ſuch anxious Concern about it, conclude, that Religion is a moſt burdenſome Thing, and that the wiſeſt Way is to be contented without enquiring much after it. Whether they who make this Concluſion, or they who adminiſter Occaſion for it, are the wiſer, is no eaſy Matter to determine: Certain it is, that the Fear of God, which is the Foundation of true Religion, differs as much from theſe Fears of Ignorance and Superſtition, as one Thing can well differ from another. The religious Man fears God becauſe he knows him; and therefore he fears him, as a wiſe, juſt, good, and merciful Father and Judge ought to be feared: His Fear is full of Love and Reverence, and has nothing dreadful in it, unleſs Guilt and a wounded Conſcience arm it with unnatural Terrors: But the ſuperſtitious Man fears God juſt as Children and weak Men fear Spirits and Apparitions; he trembles at the Thought of him, he flies from he knows not what, ſeeks Refuge he knows not where; and this Hurry and Confuſion of Mind he calls *Religion*; but the Pſalmiſt has given it a better Name, it is *Diſtraction*.

You

You ſee how unſucceſsful all theſe Attempts are to cure the Fears which ariſe from Doubts and Uncertainties in Religion: Theſe Remedies increaſe the Diſtemper, and heighten the Fear, till it comes to be a Phrenzy, and too ſtrong to ſubmit to the Cure of Reaſon and ſober Senſe. What muſt be done then? Will you exhort us to caſt away all Doubts, and to be certain and poſitive in all Points of Religion? I know full well, that this is no proper Subject for Exhortation; but I will exhort you to be diligent Enquirers after God. That you have Reaſon, you are apt enough to boaſt: That God has provided proper Employment for your Reaſon, the manifold Works of Nature and Providence bear witneſs: Theſe are the viſible Things of God, which will guide you by a ſure Clue to the Acknowledgment of the inviſible Author. And this Enquiry, as it is the firſt in order of Nature with regard to religious Knowledge, ſo is it the firſt likewiſe with regard to the Peace and Comforts of Religion: And it is with this View that I recommend this Enquiry, as a Cure for thoſe Terrors which are apt to ſeize upon unſettled Minds. Till we have a right Notion of God and his Attributes, it is impoſſible we ſhould be able to judge of

any Caſe of Religion: We may be very learned in all the Doctrines and Diſputes of this and of paſt Ages; and it is a Learning which may well make us mad, if we have no Rule to guide us through all the Difficulties that ſurround us: But he who has fixed in his Mind a juſt Notion of God, and of his Attributes, will find his Way to Peace, be the Darkneſs about him ever ſo thick. It is a great Misfortune to a Man to know much of Religion, and little of God: Such a Man's Religion muſt either be his Plague or his Contempt; it muſt appear to him either ridiculous or terrible: And let him take it which Way he will, he will find a Terror in it at laſt. It is in vain therefore to ſeek for Satisfaction till we know God, till we can ſay to our Hearts, *We know in whom we have truſted.* This will make our Religion become an holy and reverential Fear, unmixed with Terror and Confuſion; it will make our Knowledge in religious Matters become a Wiſdom unto Salvation; and preſerve to us that true Freedom of Mind, to which, as well the Scoffers of the Age as the Superſtitious are mere Strangers.

Secondly, Falſe Notions of God, and of the Honour and Worſhip due to him, are another Source of religious Terror. What

has been already ſaid of the true Notion of God may ſuffice to ſhew, how deſtructive all falſe Notions of God are to the Peace of Mankind: And as falſe Notions of the Honour and Worſhip due to God derive themſelves from the falſe Notions which Men entertain of God himſelf, there is no great Difference in the Caſes, and both are to be reſolved upon the ſame Reaſon: This latter may indeed be illuſtrated by great Variety of hiſtorical Evidence. What was their Caſe, who ſacrificed their Sons and their Daughters, and gave the Fruit of their Body as an Atonement for the Sin of their Soul? What was theirs, who cut themſelves with Knives in Honour of their God, and endeavoured to move his Compaſſion, not with the Sorrow, but with the Blood of their Hearts? I wiſh all Inſtances of this Sort were confined to the heathen World, and had never corrupted the Doctrines of Chriſt: But what muſt we ſay to the tedious and expenſive Pilgrimages and Proceſſions; what to the unnatural Mortifications and ſullen Retirements from the World, practiſed and recommended in ſome Parts of the Chriſtian Church? Are not all theſe Marks of ſlaviſh Fear, and of a Religion that carries Terror with it? Were you to inſtruct an ignorant

Perſon

Perſon in the Nature of God, by telling him that he takes Delight in ſeeing Men puniſh and afflict themſelves, in ſeeing them diveſt themſelves of all Comforts of Life, and retire to a State of mournful Silence and Solitude; what would he think this Being was? Would he not imagine him to want Benevolence and Kindneſs towards his Creatures, and that his Service was a State of Slavery and Miſery? Doubtleſs he would.

To this Head we may refer the Terrors which ariſe from the unwarranted Expectations which Men raiſe to themſelves from Religion, which ſeldom fail to be a Plague and a Torment to them at the laſt. One enters with Warmth and Zeal into the Service of God, not doubting but he ſhall find it turn to very good Account in his worldly Affairs: He reſolves to be very good, and expects to be very rich and proſperous. As ſoon as any Calamity befalls him, he is ſurprized, confounded, all his Hopes and Comforts vaniſh; and he begins to think himſelf forſaken of God, and given up to Deſtruction. Another, perhaps, fallen into Diſtreſs, takes up a religious Purpoſe to apply himſelf to God by Prayer: If he meets not with the Deliverance he expects, (and ſurely our Petitions ought not in Reaſon to preſcribe to

Providence) he falls into the very Fears before deſcribed, and thinks that God regards him not. This ſeems to have been the Pſalmiſt's Caſe; for thus he deſcribes his own Woe: *I have cried Day and Night before thee.—Why caſteſt thou off my Soul? Why hideſt thou thy Face from me?—*

Such Perſons as theſe are not apt to ſeek a Remedy, nor yet to admit any: They ſubmit to Sorrow and Deſpair: And it ſeems to be their only Comfort to refuſe Comfort; by this they think they make a right Sacrifice to God's Juſtice, giving up to Miſery the Soul which he abhors. Now if true Religion teaches you to expect temporal Proſperity as the certain Reward of ſerving God; if it has engaged to you, that all your Prayers, without Diſtinction, ſhall be anſwered; that every Affliction, though ſent perhaps for your Good and your Correction, ſhall be removed as ſoon as you deſire it; then charge all theſe Sufferings to the Account of true Religion: But if Religion has taught you no ſuch Leſſon, beware how you charge God fooliſhly, and call that Unfaithfulneſs in him, which is in Truth the Folly and Weakneſs of Man.

Now as theſe Terrors are hard to be cured, when once they have got Poſſeſſion of the Mind,

Mind, for they are obſtinate againſt Reaſon and Advice, ſo there is the more Reaſon to guard againſt them before they come. We ought, in all Conditions of Life, to limit our Hopes and Expectations within the Bounds of Probability, otherwiſe we expoſe ourſelves to perpetual Diſappointments and Vexation. The ſame Rule is neceſſary to be obſerved in Religion: We ought never to expect more from God than he has expreſsly promiſed, or than he may grant conſiſtently with the Meaſures by which his Providence rules and governs the World: If we exceed theſe Bounds, Religion, inſtead of being our Comfort, will ſoon become our Torment; but we, and not Religion, will be to blame. If we conſider that this World is a State of Trial, and that Afflictions are Trials, we can never lay it down to ourſelves, that God will relieve us at our Requeſt from all Afflictions; for this would be owning ourſelves in a State of Trial, and, at the ſame Time, expecting that no Trial ſhould come near us: It is ſuppoſing that God has ſhewn us a Way to defeat the great End of his Providence in ſending us into this World; he ſent us here to be proved, and yet we think to prevail on him not to prove us. In the great End which we ought to propoſe by our Religion,

the Salvation of our Souls, we can never be diſappointed, but through our own Fault. This is our true Comfort, and it is ſufficient to ſupport us under the Evils of the Life that now is, and to deliver us from the Fears of that which is to come.

You ſee now, from this Diſcourſe, that Religion, though it may miniſter Occaſion, is not the Cauſe of theſe Terrors. But you may reply, Were there no Senſe of Religion, there could be no ſuch Terrors. Very right; and it is as true, that were there no Reaſon, there would be no ſuch Apprehenſions: Will you blame God now for making you rational Creatures? If not, you muſt not blame him for making you capable of Religion; but you muſt uſe the Reaſon he has given you to ſearch after and know him, and then your Religion will be your Comfort: Then will you be able to ſay to yourſelf, and declare to others, *Her Ways are Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and all her Paths are Peace.*

DISCOURSE XIII.

PART II.

TWO other Kinds of religious Terror, together with their Cauſes, remain to be conſidered; and they are the Terrors of Guilt, and the Terrors which owe their Riſe to the accidental Diſorders or Infirmities of Mind or Body. To proceed then:

The Terrors of Guilt are thoſe which can alone pretend to be conſonant to the Notions of true Religion, and to derive themſelves by juſt Conſequence from them. If there be any Truth in Religion, natural or revealed, it is moſt certain, *That God will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, and render to every Man according to his Work; to thoſe*

who do well, Life and Happineſs; to thoſe who obey Unrighteouſneſs, Indignation and Wrath. As this Belief will be attended with Peace and Comfort of Mind, where Men ſincerely endeavour to perfect Holineſs in the Fear of God, ſo muſt it neceſſarily produce *Tribulation and Anguiſh in every Soul that doth Evil.* This is ſo plain and evident a Caſe, that I think no one will demand a Reaſon why it is, or muſt be ſo. The Fear of Damnation is, without all Queſtion, a reaſonable Fear; and it would be a very preſumptuous, as well as a fruitleſs Attempt, to perſuade a Man to live without Fear, who apprehends himſelf to be in ſuch a State. Weak and ſuperſtitious Minds do often indeed form very wrong Judgments concerning their own State and Condition towards God; in which Caſe, though the Judgment itſelf be erroneous, yet the Fear is natural and connected to the Judgment by juſt Conſequence. It is a great Work of Charity to aſſiſt ſuch weak Perſons, and to enable them to think better of God than they do, and not worſe of themſelves than they deſerve; and by ſuch Means to reſtore Peace and Quiet to their Minds: But to endeavour to remove their Fears, without correcting the falſe Opinions from which they proceed, muſt be

the

the Effect of great Folly or great Impiety. If you imagine the Caſe capable of Comfort and Conſolation, the conceived Opinion of having merited God's Wrath not being removed, it is a Sign of great Weakneſs, and Ignorance in the Nature both of God and Man: Or if you would raiſe a Courage to encounter theſe Fears, and inſpire Sinners with an Hardineſs againſt the Apprehenſions of Futurity, you can only hope to throw them into the other Extreme; for ſuch an hardy Contempt of God's Judgments cannot conſiſt with a rational Senſe of Religion. Theſe Fears, proceeding from Guilt, are both natural and rational; it is impoſſible therefore that either Nature or Reaſon ſhould afford any Aſſiſtance, or ſufficient Remedy againſt theſe Terrors; unleſs we ſuppoſe Reaſon and Nature to be made up of Contradictions. Is it a natural State of the Mind to be at eaſe when real Dangers ſurround us? Is it rational to be unconcerned for ourſelves when we are within view of endleſs Miſery? If not, he muſt be in a very unnatural State who can ſeparate between his Guilt and his Fears.

The Power of Conſcience is ſeen in all Men; it is common to all Countries, to all Religions; to the Learned and Unlearned,

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to Rich and Poor: It is an eſſential Character of a rational Mind; and therefore to Man, who is a rational Creature, it is natural. When we offend wilfully againſt our Senſe of Good and Evil, Conſcience never fails to reproach and torment us with the Apprehenſions of Evil and Miſery to befall us: And though Nature has not furniſhed us with a diſtinct Knowledge of the Miſery prepared for the Wicked, yet natural Conſcience gives every wicked Man a certain Expectation of it.

Theſe natural Fears of Conſcience are alſo rational Fears: There are ſome natural Fears planted in us for wiſe Purpoſes, which yet our Reaſon will teach us in great Meaſure to overcome. Such is the natural Fear of Death, all Men have it; but the more we conſult our Reaſon and Religion about it, the leſs will our Fear be: They will furniſh our Minds with Comfort againſt this Terror, and enable us to expect it with Calmneſs and Tranquility of Mind: But the Caſe is otherwiſe in the Fears of Guilt; the more we adviſe with our Reaſon, the better Ground we ſhall find for theſe Fears; the more we conſult the Principles of Religion, the more certainly we ſhall be perſuaded that the Fears of the Guilty are no

Deluſions,

Deluſions, but real Terrors. How then ſhall we eſcape theſe Terrors, which Nature, Reaſon, and Religion have bound upon the guilty Mind with ſo ſtrong Cords?

So hard it is to get rid of theſe Terrors, that, in many Caſes, they grow up to the full Stature of Diſtraction; and are too ſtrong for all the Aſſiſtance and Comfort that can be adminiſtered. When this is the Caſe, a Sinner is a woeful Spectacle; the Grief of his Soul may be read in his Countenance, from which all Cheerfulneſs is baniſhed, and nothing to be ſeen but Melancholy and Deſpair: His Days are without Pleaſure, and his Nights without Reſt: He hates the Company of his Friends, and if he retires, it is to converſe with the worſt Enemy he has, that is, with himſelf: His Life is one Scene of Miſery, and he lives only becauſe he is afraid to die. The Horrors of his Mind no Words can deſcribe, all his Thoughts work together to torment him; his Imagination calls him every Day to Judgment, and ſends him back condemned: Amidſt theſe Tortures his *Strength faileth, and his Life draweth nigh unto the Grave*, and he dies of a guilty Conſcience; a Diſtemper which no Medicine can reach, no Art can ſuccour.

Now

Now this Miſery being ſo great and unſupportable, and all Men ſo liable to it in Conſequence of Sin, we may well imagine that the Wit and Invention of Mankind have been conſtantly at work to find a Remedy for this ſore Diſeaſe. Natural Conſcience and Reaſon make the Connexion between Guilt and Fear; remove theſe, and the Fears muſt vaniſh; as is evident in the Caſe of Ideots and Madmen, who often do great Miſchief without ſhewing any Concern or Trouble for their Actions: This is one of the Devices which profligate Sinners have found out to eaſe their Burden: They bid Defiance to Conſcience and Reaſon, and ſet themſelves reſolutely to deſpiſe both God and Man. Where there is great Strength of Body, joined with a rude and brutiſh Courage, this Method may do for a while, but Time will always ſhew the Folly of it.

Others who are not capable of ſuch outrageous Impiety, and yet can as little bear the Reproaches of Conſcience and Reaſon, are often tempted to give themſelves up to Exceſs of Vice and Intemperance; they find Eaſe in loſing their Underſtanding, and their Pains abate as they grow incapable of Reflexion. How miſerable are the Terrors of Guilt, which can make Men willing to for-

get themſelves, that they may forget their Fears!

But theſe are very unnatural Methods, and which but few, in Compariſon, are capable of uſing; and yet the Caſe before us is a general Caſe, concerning all Men, as they are Sinners, and have more or leſs offended againſt the Light and Reaſon of their own Minds. Let us conſider then, what more general and rational Methods have been approved for the Cure of this Evil: Theſe are to be found in the ſeveral Forms of Religion, which do or have prevailed in the World; all of them pretending to reconcile Sinners to God, ſome by one kind of Expiation, ſome by another. It would be endleſs to ſet before you the particular Methods uſed under the ſeveral Forms of Religion: It is a Queſtion of much more Importance to enquire, Whether Reaſon and natural Religion can poſſibly furniſh a Remedy for this Evil, or no.

All Methods applicable to this Purpoſe may be reduced to two general Heads; to External Rites and Ceremonies, and to Internal Acts of the Mind.

As to External Rites and Ceremonies, they are to be found in great Abundance: We meet with Sacrifices, Oblations, Waſhings, and

and Cleanſings, in almoſt all Parts of the World, both among Jews and Heathens. How theſe ſeveral Rites came to be applied to the Purpoſes of Religion, is a Matter not eaſily to be accounted for: It will be allowed, I ſuppoſe, that nothing ought to be eſteemed a Part of the Religion of Reaſon, for which no Reaſon can be aſſigned: And yet, who can ſay upon what Principle he proceeded, who firſt killed a Lamb, or a Kid, and offered it to God as an Expiation for Guilt, or as a proper Means of obtaining his Bleſſing and Protection? What Connexion is there between the Sin of a Man, and the Sacrifice of an Ox? If I deſerve to be puniſhed for Iniquity, can I deſerve to be pardoned for ſhedding the Blood of ſome poor ſenſeleſs Animals? Or what is God, that he ſhould accept ſuch Gifts? what are divine Juſtice and Mercy, that they ſhould be moved by ſuch Oblations? If theſe Queſtions cannot be anſwered, the Conſequence muſt be, that theſe external Performances are no Part of Natural Religion.

The Sacrifices and Oblations under the Law of *Moſes* were of divine Inſtitution; and whatever Vertue they had in them, they had it in Conſequence of the Inſtitution, and the Promiſe annexed to it; which

which is a Point in which mere natural Religion can have no Concern: And the Author to the *Hebrews* has assured us, That even these Sacrifices *did not make him that did the Service perfect, as pertaining to the Conscience.* The Use he assigns to them is, That they *sanctified to the purifying of the Flesh*, that is, they gave a legal or external Purity; so that he who had duly, in these Methods, done away his Uncleanness, or atoned for his Errors, was a legal Member of the external Church and Commonwealth of *Israel*. But what is this to the taking away of Guilt, and to restoring us to the Favour of God?

It has been pleaded in behalf of Sacrifices, and the like Performances, that they are very expressive Signs of a Sinner's Religion: He who brings a Bullock to the Altar, as an Offering for Sin, confesses his Iniquity; when he slays him, he acknowledges before God what he himself ought to suffer; and deprecates the Punishment which he owns to be justly due to himself. Allow all this, and it must appear to you, that these external Performances are in themselves of no Value, but have all their Value from that true Religion, and those Acts of it, of which they are significative. I will not trouble

you

you with enquiring upon what Motives, or Principles of Reaſon, natural Religion dreſſes herſelf out in Signs and Symbols: The Inquiry is not pertinent to the preſent Purpoſe: For be this as it will, the Value of the Signs depends upon the true Value of the Things ſignified, which are internal Acts: And the Queſtion before us muſt be determined by conſidering, Whether the internal Acts of Religion, natural and proper to the State of a Sinner, can expiate Guilt, and reſtore to the Favour of God.

The Religion of a Sinner is an Application for Pardon; and unleſs it can preſcribe a proper Method for obtaining it, it is uſeleſs and inſignificant. The two Attributes of God, with which this Religion is chiefly concerned, are his Juſtice and Mercy: But if we argue, that infinite Juſtice muſt neceſſarily puniſh all Iniquity, that infinite Mercy muſt extend to all Offences, we get into a Maze, in which we may wander for ever, without finding any Way to get out. I will ſuppoſe therefore (and it is the very Truth) that Juſtice and Mercy both meet in the Rules of Reaſon and Equity; and that the Judgments of God are righteous Judgments, free from all ſuch Blemiſhes as human Judgments are liable to from a weak

Inclination

Inclination to Mercy, or a rigorous Affectation of Juſtice.

In a Point of mere Natural Religion, I will not expect the Doctrines of Revelation to be admitted as Principles; I will not inſiſt therefore that all Men are Sinners: And I think it will not be denied that great Numbers are; ſo many, that Natural Religion can be of little Uſe, if it has no Remedy for this Caſe.

Now all that Natural Religion has to offer to God in behalf of a Sinner, is the Sorrow of his Heart for what is paſt, and the Purpoſe of his Mind to offend no more.

Let us conſider this Caſe: Sorrow for Sin, in ſuch as apprehend they ſhall certainly and miſerably ſuffer for it, is a very natural Paſſion: But there is no Vertue in it: It is not ſo much as the Effect of Choice; for a Man muſt neceſſarily grieve, when he is ſure he has made himſelf miſerable. It never was made Part of a vertuous Man's Character, that he lived in Fear of the Gallows or the Whipping Poſt; and did you know any good Man poſſeſſed with ſuch Fears, inſtead of commending his Temper, you muſt needs laugh at his Folly. This Obſervation muſt cut off all that Repentance which ariſes merely from Apprehenſions of Evil; and

much I fear, that it will, in great Meaſure, diſable Natural Religion from finding a Remedy againſt Guilt. The Generality of Mankind are far from being Philoſophers, or able to look back upon their Iniquities with ſo much Calmneſs and Judgment, as are neceſſary to create a juſt Abhorrence of Vice, and to produce a real Change in the Affections of the Heart, and reſtore the pure Love of God and of Vertue, where Vice and Luſt had been long predominant. Let us allow to ſuch a Change as this all that can be aſked in its Behalf: What then? Will you conclude, that the World has no Reaſon to look beyond Natural Religion for a Remedy againſt Sin? Will you call that a proper Religion for the World, which is fitted only to the Purpoſes of perhaps twenty in a Country, and perhaps not to half the Number? God has dealt with Mankind in ſuch Methods, as are ſuited to that Degree of Reaſon which he has generally beſtowed, and to which Men generally may arrive, under the Cares and Burdens and neceſſary Employments of Life: And there is nothing more abſurd, than to think all Men capable of ſuch Reaſonings as ſome few of diſtinguiſhed Abilities have arrived at: Eſpecially in the Caſe of Religion, which is,

and

and ought to be, every Man's Concern, to ſuppoſe that the Speculations of a few contemplative Men can be reduced to common Uſe and Practice, is downright Enthuſiaſm. All wiſe Governors have fortified their Laws with Penalties, intending that the Fear of Puniſhment ſhould keep the Subject from offending; but without ever imagining themſelves obliged to ſpare all ſuch as ſhould diſcover a Fear of the Puniſhment, after they had incurred it by Diſobedience. Now our Reaſon being the common Rule by which we judge of the Actions of all reaſonable Beings, and by which we ought to regulate our own; how come we to judge it reaſonable for God to do that, which, in parallel Circumſtances, we never think reaſonable to do ourſelves? It may be ſaid, that we are not capable of judging in this Caſe, and diſtinguiſhing between the mere Fear of Puniſhment, and the rational Sorrow for having offended; but God can diſtinguiſh, and therefore there is ground to ſuppoſe him to act otherwiſe than Reaſon in our Circumſtances can oblige us to act. Admit this Difference, and it follows, that all who are willing to reform merely through the Fears and Terrors of Guilt are without Remedy: Which ſhews, that the far greater Number

of Sinners are in an helpleſs State under Natural Religion.

But let us ſee what the Condition is of one ſeriouſly convinced of the Iniquity of Sin, and purpoſing to forſake it. The Caſe ſuppoſes him to have ſinned ſo as to deſerve Puniſhment by all the Rules of Reaſon and Equity: The Queſtion is, Whether a ſincere Alteration of Mind can give him Security of a Pardon. I ſuppoſe it agreed by all who admit a future Judgment, that Miſery and Happineſs are ſet before us upon ſome Terms; I ſuppoſe likewiſe, that it will be deemed reaſonable for God to act upon ſuch Terms as Reaſon itſelf, the Interpreter of God's Will in this Caſe, propoſes to us. Conſider now; We come into this World reaſonable Creatures, enabled to diſtinguiſh between Good and Evil; We find ourſelves accountable for our Behaviour to God our Maker and our Judge: From theſe Principles the Conſequence is certain, That Obedience to the Moral Law is the Condition of Salvation: But how will you come to the Conſequence ſo much wanted, That whoever lives in Diſobedience ſhall be ſaved, if ever he grows ſenſible of the Folly and Iniquity of ſo doing? Is this Condition implied in any Law in the Univerſe? Would it be a fit Condition for God to propoſe to Men

Men at their first setting out in a State of Nature? No, you will say, it would enervate the Force of all his Laws. How comes it then to be absolutely fit for God to do that, which it is absolutely unfit he should ever promise or profess? But we depend, you will say, upon the Equity and Goodness of God. You do well: But where do you learn this Equity? How do you find it to be equitable, that Men should live by one Rule, and be judged by another? No Man will affirm, that Reason teaches us to think God and his Law satisfied by sinning, and then repenting: We are not to conduct our Lives by this Rule, why then must we needs be judged by this Rule? especially since it is a confessed Maxim, that the Rule of Life and the Rule of Judgment ought to be the same. It may perhaps be thought, that the Goodness of God, considered, and the Weakness and Frailty of Man, and his Inability to pay a punctual Obedience in all Things to the Law of Reason; it is a reasonable Construction upon the Law of Nature to expect Pardon for our Failings and Omissions, and that the very Terms of our Obedience carry this equitable Construction with them. This to me seems the most material Thing to be said upon the Subject, and I readily allow

it: But the moſt that can be made of it is, that we ſhall be entitled to equitable Allowances in the Courſe of an imperfect Obedience: But it does not come up to the Caſe of ſuch, who, under all theſe Allowances, fall from their Obedience, and forfeit the Favour of God. But theſe are the Perſons for whom we ſeek Relief.

Upon the Whole, it does not appear that Natural Religion has any certain Cure for the Terrors of Guilt; becauſe the Title by Obedience being forfeited, there are no certain Principles of Reaſon from which we can conclude how far, and to what Inſtances, the Mercy of God will extend; becauſe we can have no Aſſurance of ourſelves, that our Sorrow is ſuch, and our Reſolutions of Amendment ſuch, as may deſerve Mercy; and laſtly, becauſe this whole Matter, whatever there be in it, is founded upon Reaſons and Speculations too exact, and too refined, to be of common Uſe to Mankind. And this laſt Reaſon alone will, I think, ſufficiently juſtify the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, in propoſing to the World a ſafe and general Method for the Salvation of Sinners: For what if you have Penetration enough to ſee a Way for Sinners to eſcape under Natural Religion; muſt your great Parts be a Meaſure

ſure for God's dealing with all the World? Shall thouſands and thouſands live and dye without Comfort, becauſe they cannot reaſon as you do? This Conſideration ſhould make thoſe who have the higheſt Opinion of themſelves, and therefore of Natural Religion, adore the Goodneſs of God, in condeſcending to the Infirmities of Men, and ſhewing them the Way to Mercy, which they were unable to find out. This he has done, by the Revelation of the Goſpel of Chriſt Jeſus, which is the Sinner's great Charter of Pardon, a certain Remedy againſt all the Fears and Terrors of Guilt.

Here then is a ſafe Retreat for the guilty Conſcience; here God appears, and gives his own unalterable Word for your Security: The Son of God is your Mediator and High Prieſt, to offer up and ſanctify the Sorrows of a broken Heart; and to bring down ſpiritual Strength, Joy, and Comfort to the Penitent, and to perfect the Work begun in you by his Grace and Aſſiſtance. Let no Man therefore ſink under the Terrors of Guilt, but let him approach the Throne of Grace; but if in no Confidence of himſelf, yet in full Confidence in the Promiſes made through Chriſt, by whom, and through

whom, every Sinner who returns to God ſhall be ſaved.

After ſo much done for the Security of Sinners on God's Part, and ſuch great Conſolations provided againſt the Terrors of Guilt, it is much to be lamented there ſhould be any ſtill incapable of Comfort: Yet ſuch there are, of whom I propoſed to ſpeak in the laſt Place, whoſe religious Fears ariſe from accidental Diſorders of Mind or Body. This Caſe is not ſubject to Reaſon, and therefore much cannot be ſaid upon it. Whatever the Union of Soul and Body is, ſo united they are, that the Diſorders of one often derive themſelves to the other: A melancholy Mind will waſte the Strength, and bring Paleneſs and Leanneſs upon the Body: Diſorders in the Body do often affect the Mind; a Stroke of the Palſey will rob a Man of the Uſe of his Underſtanding, and leave him diſabled in Mind as well as Body. For this Reaſon it is that I aſcribe ſome religious Fears to the Diſorders of the Body, though they properly belong to the Mind. We call only great Diſorders in the Mind Madneſs; but all Diſorders, as far as they extend, are of the ſame Kind: The melancholy Man, who thinks himſelf in a State of Damnation, without any Reaſon,

or

or Power to reaſon upon his Caſe, is as certainly in this Point a Madman, as the poor Wretch, whoſe Diſorder has taken another Turn, and makes him believe himſelf to be a King or an Emperor. There are many Inſtances of this Kind abroad in the World: The unhappy Sufferers, were they capable of receiving the Advice, ſhould be directed to ſeek their Cure from Phyſicians rather than Divines. Were I to give you Inſtances in what Manner theſe religious Fears work, what unreaſonable Suſpicions and Jealouſies they create, how full they oftentimes are of Abſurdity and manifeſt Contradiction, it would evidently appear to you, that they are truly Diſtempers either in the Mind or Body; but this would be but melancholy Entertainment, and of no great Uſe. Such Perſons as theſe are not chargeable with ſeeking falſe Comfort for themſelves; for it is Part of their Diſtemper to refuſe all Comfort. The true Comfort we have for them they are unable to receive, That they are not capable of judging of themſelves, and that he, to whom Judgment belongeth, will deal with them not according to their Imaginations, but according to the Rules of his own Goodneſs and Righteouſneſs.

Theſe

Theſe Terrors cannot be imputed as a Blemiſh to Religion; not by him at leaſt, who acknowledges the Providence of God, and whoſe Principle of Religion is Reaſon: For all Madneſs is deſtructive of Reaſon, as much as theſe Terrors are of Religion: They are both deſtructive: They are Evils to which we muſt ſubmit: And if we cannot account for the Reaſon of them, it becomes us to be dumb, and not open our Mouths in his Preſence, *whoſe Ways are paſt finding out.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PSALM XIX. 14.

Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer.

I HAVE made Choice of theſe Words, with which the Holy Pſalmiſt ſhuts up this nineteenth Pſalm, intending to open to you the Scheme of Thought which runs through the Whole. It contains one of the compleateſt Forms of Devotion, and of the moſt general Uſe, of thoſe recorded in his Writings. When his Thoughts turn upon his own Circumſtances, which were in all Reſpects great and uncommon, and ſuch as the Generality of Men can never experience, it is no wonder

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to find his Prayers and his Songs of Praiſes conceived in no common Strain. When a King ſtands before the Altar, we may well expect a royal Sacrifice; ſuch an one as is not expected from a private Hand, nor fit to be offered by it. But here, in the Pſalm before you, the Crown and the Sceptre are laid by, his own Dignity is forgotten, and his whole Mind employed in contemplating the mighty Things of Providence, diſplayed in the Works of Nature, and of Grace. Exalted Thoughts of God do naturally produce the loweſt, which are always the juſteſt, of ourſelves. Thus the royal Pſalmiſt, having warmed his Heart with the Glory of the Almighty, as if he were now in the Poſture in which all Kings muſt one Day appear before their Maker, confeſſes his own Weakneſs, and flies to Mercy and Grace for Protection: *Who can underſtand his Errors?* ſays he, *cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults. Keep back thy Servant alſo from preſumptuous Sins, let them not have Dominion over me: Then ſhall I be upright, and I ſhall be innocent from the great Tranſgreſſion.*

The Piety of this Pſalm is ſo natural, and yet ſo exalted; ſo eaſy to be underſtood, ſo adapted to move the Affections, that it is hardly poſſible to read it with any Attention,

without

without feeling ſomething of the ſame Spirit by which it was indited: *The Heavens*, ſays the Holy King, *declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament ſheweth his handy Work. Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night ſheweth Knowledge. There is no Speech nor Language where their Voice is not heard.* He begins with the Works of the Creation, to magnify the Power and Wiſdom of the Creator: They are a perpetual Inſtruction to Mankind, every Day and every Night ſpeak his Goodneſs, and, by their regular and conſtant Viciſſitude, ſet forth the Excellency of Wiſdom by which they are ordered. This Book of Nature is written in every Language, and lies open to all the World: The Works of the Creation ſpeak in the common Voice of Reaſon, and want no Interpreter to explain their Meaning; but are to be underſtood by People of all Languages upon the Face of the Earth: *There is no Speech nor Language where their Voice is not heard.* From theſe Works in general he ſingles out one, to ſtand as a Teſtimony of the Power of his Maker: The Sun is the great Spirit of the World, the Life that animates theſe lower Parts: How conſtant and unwearied is his Courſe! How large his Circuit, to impart Light and genial Heat to every

every dark Corner of the Earth! *He is as a Bridegroom coming out of his Chamber, and rejoiceth as a ſtrong Man to run a Race. His going forth is from the End of the Heaven, and his Circuit unto the Ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the Heat thereof.*

From this mighty Scene and Proſpect of Nature the Pſalmiſt turns his Thoughts to the Conſideration of the ſtill greater Works of Grace: The rational World, as in itſelf the nobleſt, ſo has it been the more peculiar Care of Providence to preſerve and adorn it. The Sun knows its Courſe, and has always trod the Path marked out by the Creator: The Sea keeps its old Channel, and, in its utmoſt Fury, remembers the firſt Law of its Maker, *Hitherto ſhalt thou go, and no further:* But Freedom and Reaſon, ſubject to no ſuch Reſtraint, have produced infinite Variety in the rational World: Of all the Creatures Man only could forget his Maker and himſelf, and proſtitute the Honour of both, by robbing God of the Obedience due to him, and by ſubmitting himſelf a Slave to the Elements of the World. When he looked up to the Heavens, and ſaw the Glory of the Sun and Stars, inſtead of praiſing the Lord of all, he fooliſhly ſaid, Theſe are thy Gods, O Man! When Man was thus loſt in Ignorance

rance and Superſtition, God manifeſted himſelf again, gave him a Law to direct his Will and inform his Reaſon, and to teach him in all Things how to purſue his own Happineſs. This was a kind of ſecond Creation, a Work that calls as much both for our Wonder and our Praiſe, as any or all the Works of Nature. And thus the holy Pſalmiſt ſings the Triumphs of Grace, and extols the Mercy and Power of God in the reſtoring Mankind from the Bondage of Ignorance and Idolatry: *The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the Soul: The Teſtimony of the Lord is ſure, making wiſe the ſimple: The Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the Heart: The Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the Eyes: The Fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: The Judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether: More to be deſired are they than Gold, yea than much fine Gold: Sweeter alſo than Honey and the Honeycomb: Moreover by them is thy Servant warned, and in keeping them there is great Reward.* To theſe divine Oracles the Sinner owes the Converſion of his Soul: To the Light of God's Word the Simple owes his Wiſdom; nay, even the Pleaſures of Life, and all the ſolid Comforts we enjoy, flow from the ſame living Spring: The Statutes

of

of the Lord do rejoice the Heart, as well as enlighten the Eyes; and not only ſhew us the Danger and Miſeries of Iniquity, and by ſhewing teach us to avoid them, but do lead us likewiſe to certain Happineſs and Joy for evermore: *For in keeping them there is great Reward.*

But is it poſſible, whilſt thus we praiſe and adore God for all his Mercies, to forget one great Circumſtance, which affects both them and ourſelves? I mean, how undeſerved they are! It is a Reflexion, which, like the Pillar of the Cloud that waited on the *Iſraelites*, caſts Light and Beauty upon the Mercies of God, Darkneſs and Confuſion of Face upon ourſelves. Can we help thinking, that, notwithſtanding God has thus ſecured and hedged us about with a Law that is perfect, with Commandments that are pure, with Judgments that are true and righteous altogether; yet ſtill our own Weakneſs is perpetually betraying us into Error, our Folly or our Wickedneſs driving us into Sins, more in Number than either we can or care to remember? The Royal Pſalmiſt ſaw the Juſtneſs of this Reflexion, and whilſt his Heart glowed with the Senſe of God's unbounded Mercies, he turned ſhort upon himſelf

ſelf with this Complaint, *Who can underſtand his Errors?*

This Complaint is followed by a fervent Prayer to God for Pardon and Protection: From the Proſpect of the Power and Goodneſs of God, and our own Weakneſs and Miſery, the Soul eaſily melts into Sorrow and Devotion, lamenting what it feels, and imploring what it wants from the Hand which only is able to ſave and to redeem: *O cleanſe thou me*, ſays the Royal Penitent, *from ſecret Faults*. This Petition flowed from an Heart intimately touched with the Senſe of its own Unworthineſs: Secret he calls his Faults, not with a Deſign to extenuate his Crimes, or as if he thought the Actions he had now in his View of ſo doubtful a Nature, that it was not eaſily to be judged, whether they ſhould be placed among the ſinful, or the indifferent Circumſtances of his Life; and therefore, if they were Faults, they were ſecret ones, ſuch as ſtole from him without the Conſent or Approbation of his Mind: But ſecret he calls them, with reſpect to their Number; ſo often he had offended, that his Memory was too frail to keep an exact Regiſter of all his Errors; but though they were ſecret to him, yet well he knew, that God had placed them in the Light of his Countenance; and there-

fore, though he could neither number or confeſs them, he begs that they might not be imputed, or riſe up in Judgment againſt his Soul. This Senſe is well expreſſed in our old Tranſlation, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanſe thou me from my ſecret Faults!*

But though our Sins are more in Number than the Hairs of our Head, yet ſome there are that ſtand diſtinguiſhed by an uncommon Guilt, and will always be preſent to our Minds, whenever we approach the Throne of Grace for Pardon. Theſe we ſhould particularly lament, againſt theſe we ſhould particularly pray, when we ſeek to God for Strength and Aſſiſtance. In this Strain the Holy Pſalmiſt continues his Devotion, *Keep back thy Servant alſo from preſumptuous Sins; let them not have Dominion over me: Then ſhall I be upright, and I ſhall be innocent from the great Tranſgreſſion.*

Having thus extolled his Maker for the Greatneſs of his Power and Mercy, and humbled himſelf for the Number and the Heinouſneſs of his Iniquities, he cloſes this Scene of Praiſe and of Devotion in the Language of the Text, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be*

always acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

I have endeavoured to open to you the Scheme of Thought which runs through this excellent Pattern of Prayer and Meditation; hoping by this more effectually to warm your Minds into a Senſe of this Duty, and to ſet before you in a better Light the Beauty both of Praiſe and Prayer, when duly performed, and accompanied with proper Affections of the Heart, than by any thing I could ſay to you upon the Subject: It is a Subject indeed that ſpeaks for itſelf: And a Prayer, or a Song of Praiſe, compoſed in the true Spirit of Piety and Devotion, is the greateſt Incitement, as well as the beſt Direction, for the Performance of the reſpective Duties. A Man's Heart muſt be as cold as Marble, who can read or hear the Songs of holy Joy and Rapture, with which the Saints of old gave Praiſe to their Maker, and not feel ſome Reſentments of the ſame Spirit of Joy and Gratitude in his Breaſt; or who can go over a Prayer which expreſſes the Guilt of Sin, and confeſſes the Weakneſs of Nature, and pours forth the Cries of an afflicted Soul for Mercy and Pardon, and not be touched with the Deſcription of Circumſtances which are ſo much his own; or

not ſend forth the Wiſhes of his own Heart to attend the Cries for Mercy and Pardon, which he ſo certainly ſtands in need of obtaining. A Scene of Miſery, drawn either by the Poet's or the Painter's Skill, has Force enough to move the Pity of a compaſſionate Heart; for we are ſo near allied to the Sufferings of our Fellow-Creatures, by ſharing in the ſame Nature, which as it ſubjected them, ſo it expoſes us to the Miſeries we behold, that we cannot reſiſt the Impreſſions of Sorrow ariſing from Circumſtances which may any Day happen to be our own: Much leſs can we ſtand by, as unconcerned Lookers on, when we behold the Miſery of a Soul afflicted for Sin, or when we hear the ardent Prayers which are poured forth in the Preſence of God for Pardon and Mercy, or ſee the Tears which flow from the Pangs of a wounded Spirit; for this Caſe, this miſerable Condition, not only may be, but moſt certainly is our own: Theſe Tears, theſe Cries for Mercy, ſhould be ours, ſince the Cauſe is ours from whence they proceed; nor can we well help partaking in them, nor be altogether inſenſible of the Grief of our Fellow-Sufferers.

There is the ſame Reaſon for our being affected with the Praiſes of God, and join-

ing to give Glory to his Name, whenever we read the Songs of Thankſgiving recorded in Scripture, as Inſtances of the Tribute which God expects, and which the Saints are uſed to pay; for his Mercies are diſpenſed with an equal Hand, he maketh the Sun to riſe upon the Juſt and the Unjuſt; and when we ſhare the Bleſſings, and partake in the ſame Mercies, how can we refuſe to bear our Part in offering up the Incenſe of Praiſe; or how reſiſt the Motions of Gratitude, which ariſe from the Senſe of thoſe Enjoyments which are the Gift of Heaven? This Pſalm of *David*, in how exalted a Strain is it penned; how nobly is the Song raiſed from Circumſtances which at once ſet forth in equal Beauty the Majeſty and the Mercy of the Almighty? and yet there is not one Act of Providence mentioned, one Inſtance of Grace recorded, that you do not as largely reap the Benefit of, and are as much in Duty and Gratitude bound to be thankful for as even *David* himſelf. Nay, the Advantage is certainly on your Side in this Reſpect: The Heavens indeed are the ſame they were in *David*'s time; and Day and Night, conſtant to their Maker's Law, have walked the ſame unwearied Round: The Sun ſhines out with

the ſame Beauty and Light to animate and refreſh the World: The material Sun I mean: For ſince *David*'s time the Sun of Righteouſneſs himſelf has aroſe in our Firmament, and ſhed forth the choiceſt Bleſſings of Heaven upon the Inhabitants of the Earth: The Glories of the Meſſiah's Reign, and the Happineſs of his Days, were Proſpects, which at a Diſtance, and but darkly ſeen, could fill the Mouths of the Saints and Prophets with the Praiſes of the Lord! And can we be ſilent, who enjoy the Fulneſs of thoſe Mercies to whom the Saviour of the World has opened the richeſt Treaſures of God's Bounty and Goodneſs? Look back and ſee with what Pleaſure and Rapture the Holy Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of the Laws and Judgments of God; *more deſirable* they were to him *than the fineſt Gold*; *ſweeter than the Honey and the Honey Comb*: And yet he lived under the *Moſaick* Law, a Yoke hard to be borne. Had he ſeen the Days of the Goſpel, and taſted the Righteouſneſs of this new Law, I am at a Loſs even to imagine in what Strains of holy Eloquence his Joy would have flowed. When he applies to God for Pardon and Forgiveneſs for paſt Offences, for Strength and Aſſiſtance to preſerve him for the future, with what a noble Reſignation of Soul, and

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ſure Truſt in God, does he diſcharge this Part of his Devotion! And yet he had not all the Encouragements for this Duty which we enjoy: He had never heard the Melody of that heavenly Voice which daily calls us to Repentance, *Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refreſh you:* Nor had he received thoſe expreſs Promiſes of Grace and Spiritual Aſſiſtance, which have ſince been confirmed to us by the Blood of the New Covenant. To return therefore to the Thought which made Way for theſe Reflexions: We have all imaginable Reaſon to join with all our Hearts, and all our Minds, in theſe exalted Forms of Prayer and Praiſe: We on whom the Bleſſings of Heaven have been doubled, who have been made the Children of God by the Spirit of Adoption, who have had the Charter of God's Pardon granted to us by his bleſſed Son, and have received the Promiſes of a Kingdom, which ſhall remain as long as Time endureth. As our Theme has been thus exalted, ſo ſhould our Praiſes be likewiſe; ſo ſhould the Affections of our Souls be raiſed to acknowledge and adore the Giver of theſe good and perfect Gifts. We need not fear being too laviſh upon this Occaſion: Let the Tide of Joy run ever ſo

high, it cannot ſwell beyond the Dignity of the Subject: Our Praiſes are but a poor Tribute for what we have received; our Prayers a Price of no Value for what we aſk: And even thoſe too have their Imperfections, when performed in the beſt Manner; that were we not in the Hands of a merciful God, who is not extreme to mark what is done amiſs, we ſhould not dare to open our Mouths before him, either in Prayer or in Praiſe. And this Reflexion ſeems to have led the Holy Pſalmiſt to that Petition which is contained in the Words read to you for the Text, and with which this excellent Compoſure is cloſed up, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be always acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

If we conſider theſe Words with a Retroſpect upon what went before, and ſuppoſe the Holy Pſalmiſt here to reflect upon what he had been doing, the Meaning of them then muſt be that which I have ſuggeſted; He had been praiſing God for all his Goodneſs to the Children of Men; had been by fervent Prayer imploring his Protection againſt the Snares and Allurements of Sin: But what were his Prayers or his Praiſes to God? or what valuable Sacrifice could Duſt

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and Aſhes offer up to the Almighty? Struck with this juſt Senſe of Humility, he ſtirs not from the Place or Subject of his Devotion, till he had firſt begged Pardon for the Lameneſs of his Sacrifice, for the Imperfections even of his Prayers and Praiſes, and implored God's Acceptance of the poor Tribute he was able to pay him. He knew how imperfect the beſt of his Actions were; how unworthy his Praiſes were of God; and how dangerous a Subject Prayer is, *ſince we know not what we ſhould pray for as we ought.* Prayer, if not directed by the Spirit, will be influenced by the Paſſions, and taught the unworthy Language of Self-Love: Far therefore from being exalted with his Performance, the Saint retires excuſing his Devotion, and begging one further Mercy of God, That he would accept the Service he was able to offer. An Example worthy of our Imitation! and which yet we are hardly worthy enough to imitate: For if we conſider with what Coldneſs we paſs through our Prayers and Praiſes, with what Inattention we are preſent at the Service of God, how our Thoughts wander, and our Hearts are ſurprized into the Purſuit of vain and idle Conceits, or are poſſeſſed with worldly Thoughts and Care, we muſt needs think

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it an Act of the higheſt Preſumption to deſire God to receive ſuch Devotion, or to accept the Meditation of ſuch idle roving Hearts. This was not the Pſalmiſt's Caſe: When he began the Praiſes of God, he launched out into his Courſe with the Life and Vigour of the Sun, which he deſcribes, *like a Bridegroom coming out of his Chamber, and rejoicing as a ſtrong Man to run his Race:* When his Subject naturally changed upon his Hand, and Prayer took place of Praiſe, his Mind followed his Subject, and the Petitions themſelves ſhew with what Zeal and Fervour of Spirit they were offered up. And if ſuch Devotion as this was to beg Admittance to the Preſence of God, and not to appear without an Excuſe, what muſt become of ours? ſince, without injuring our own Merit, many of us have Reaſon to ſay when we leave the Church, Lord, lay not this Sin to our Charge! For ſurely to approach the Throne of God with Indevotion, with Hearts not diſpoſed to Seriouſneſs, to ſit out the Prayers of the Church as if ſomething were doing in which we have no Concern, is one of thoſe Offences which are noted down in the Book, and for which God will call the Sons of Men into Judgment.

But

But ſecondly, The Words of the Text are capable of a more enlarged Senſe: The Pſalmiſt had begged for Mercy for his ſecret Faults; had implored the Aſſiſtance of God to preſerve him from preſumptuous Sin; and if you continue the Thought to the Words of the Text, in them he beſeeches God to take under his Direction likewiſe the Words of his Mouth, and the Thoughts of his Heart, that he might be continued innocent and blameleſs in Thought, Word, and Deed. This Senſe expreſſes the greateſt Regard to Vertue and Innocence, and the fulleſt Dependence upon the Grace and Protection of God: He knew that God not only ſaw all his Actions, his open and notorious Sins, but that he ſpied out all his Ways, and knew his Thoughts long before; and that it was in vain for him to waſh his Hands in Innocence, unleſs he purged his Heart likewiſe from all Filthineſs of Spirit: To him therefore he applies, that he would guard the Paſſages of his Heart, and ſet a Watch upon the Door of his Lips, that nothing unclean might enter into one, or proceed out of the other. Our Lord has told us, *That for every idle Word Men ſhall give an Account in the Day of Judgment:* And his Apoſtle St. *Paul* has taught us, *That there*

there will be a Day in which God will judge the Secrets of all Men by Chriſt Jeſus: Which are ſufficient Cautions to us to be watchful over our Tongues and our Hearts, that they rob us not of the Fruit of all our Labour and Hope. Unchaſte Thoughts, and looſe Deſires, are the Beginning of lewd and impure Actions; and if they are generated and conceived in the Heart, that fruitful Womb of Iniquity, they will ſoon be born into the World, and grow up to the full Stature of Sin. To ſecure the Heart is therefore the Ground-work of Vertue: It is almoſt the one Thing neceſſary, ſince without it no other Care can be effectual: It is that only which can render our Praiſes or Prayers acceptable to God, and give us Courage to offer up our imperfect Devotions before his Throne. The beſt of Men have their Failings, and an honeſt Chriſtian may be a weak one; but weak as he may be, the Goodneſs and Sincerity of his Heart will entitle him to put up the Petition of the Text, which no Hypocrite or cunning Deceiver can ever make uſe of, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer.*

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XV.

LUKE xii. 21.

So is he that layeth up Treaſure for himſelf, and is not rich towards God.

THE Riches of the World being often the Fruits of Injuſtice and Oppreſſion, one wealthy Man's Eſtate being raiſed perhaps upon the Ruin and Poverty of hundreds, and built upon the Tears and Cries of Widows and Orphans; and yet being ſometimes repreſented in Scripture as the Bleſſing of God upon the honeſt Labour and Induſtry of Men diligent in their Calling or Profeſſion; or as the Reward beſtowed upon a vertuous Contentment, and Reſignation of Mind to the Providence of the Almighty: A great Fortune being often uſed

to

to very ill Purpoſes, to the Increaſe of Luxury and Wantonneſs, to the Encouragement of Vice, and to the Miſchief of all who are the unhappy Neighbours of an over-grown rich Man; and yet being in itſelf applicable to the beſt Uſes in the World, to the Promotion of Vertue and Holineſs, to the Advancement of the Honour of God, and to the ſetting forward the common Good and Happineſs of Mankind: There being ſuch different Ways both of getting and enjoying the Riches of the World, the Poſſeſſion of them has been either valued or deſpiſed, condemned or approved by Moraliſts and Divines, according to the View they have had of them with relation to the ſeveral Methods by which they are obtained and employed. *The Hand of the Diligent*, ſaith Solomon, *maketh rich*: And again, *The Bleſſing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no Sorrow with it*; yet at other Times he obſerved Riches that had no Bleſſing in them, *There is a ſore Evil which I have ſeen under the Sun, namely, Riches kept for the Owners thereof to their Hurt.*

From this Obſervation I think all Diſputes about Riches may be reconciled: Where they are ill got, or ill uſed, they are an Hurt to the Owner; where they are

honeſtly

honeſtly got, and worthily enjoyed, they are a Bleſſing to the Owner, and through his Means to many others. Thus far the Caſe is plain: But then it is a Matter of further Conſideration, to ſee what the Iniquity is that generally follows a large Poſſeſſion. The rich Man's Crimes are commonly conſidered under the Head of Profuſeneſs or Covetouſneſs: To the firſt are referred Luxury, Intemperance, and all the Sins of Pleaſure which Wealth furniſhes and ſupports: To the ſecond Head are reduced Fraud, Oppreſſion, want of Kindneſs and Charity, and all the Iniquity that attends the unreaſonable Deſire of getting or preſerving an Eſtate. All theſe indeed are very great and too common Faults among rich Men: But there is ſtill a more ſecret Iniquity that ſticks cloſe to great Poſſeſſions, and which does not always diſcover itſelf in the ill Effects before-mentioned: A Man may have an Eſtate honeſtly gotten, and in the Eye of the World he may uſe it in all Reſpects as he ought, and yet ſtill be a very wicked rich Man. What, you will ſay, although he be free from Covetouſneſs, given to Hoſpitality, and liberal to the Poor? if theſe Things will not preſerve Riches from the Contagion of Guilt, what will? But before

before you judge too haſtily in this Cauſe, you muſt conſider that Vertue does not conſiſt merely in the outward Act; it is not the material Action that denominates a Man good or bad, but the Judgment in this Caſe muſt regard the Principle from whence the Actions flow. A prodigal Man ſquanders his Money without Regard, or Diſtinction of Perſons or Occaſion: Where Tenderneſs and Good-nature attend upon this Vice, the Poor and Miſerable often gather largely of the prodigal Man's Scatterings: But will you call this Chriſtian Charity, where perhaps the Duty owing to God was never once thought on, and of all that was given, not one Farthing offered as Tribute to the great Giver of every good Gift; but the Fountain Head was corrupt, though the Stream indeed flowed in no ill Channel?

If we conſider the Parable of the rich Man, of which the Words of the Text are the Moral or Application, we ſhall diſcover what particular Evil in Riches our Saviour pointed at, and deſigned to correct by the Inſtruction of this Parable. The Story is this: *The Ground of a certain rich Man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himſelf, ſaying, What ſhall I do, becauſe I have no room where to beſtow my Fruits?*

And

And he ſaid this will I do: I will pull down my Barns and build greater, and there will I beſtow all my Fruits and my Goods. And I will ſay to my Soul, Soul thou haſt much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry. But God ſaid unto him, Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul ſhall be required of thee; then whoſe ſhall thoſe Things be which thou haſt provided? After which follow the Words of the Text, *So is he that layeth up Treaſure for himſelf, and is not rich towards God.*

The firſt Thing to be enquired into is the true Drift and Meaning of this Parable: In the fifteenth Verſe of this Chapter our Lord warns his Hearers *to beware of Covetouſneſs:* In this Parable he repreſents the fooliſh rich Man enlarging his Barns, that he might heap up his Goods in Store: In the Text he warns us of the Danger of laying up Treaſures for ourſelves, whilſt we neglect being rich towards God: And in the thirty-third Verſe he exhorts us *to ſell that we have, and give Alms: to provide for ourſelves Bags which wax not old, a Treaſure in the Heavens that faileth not, where no Thief approacheth, neither Moth corrupteth.* From theſe Circumſtances it is commonly underſtood, that Covetouſneſs was the rich Man's Crime; that en-

larging his Barns to receive his plentiful Crop was the Inſtance and Proof of it; and that the only Way to be rich towards God is to ſell our Goods, and to diſtribute them in Works of Charity and Mercy: Thus this Parable is commonly underſtood, but I think not rightly. Our Saviour, it is true, introduces this Parable in Conſequence of the Caution he had given againſt Covetouſneſs: But he had before given a Reaſon againſt Covetouſneſs, *For a Man's Life*, ſays he, *conſiſteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth:* And the Parable was added to illuſtrate this Reaſon given againſt Covetouſneſs, and not to diſplay the Folly or Vice of Covetouſneſs in general: The rich Man is not deſcribed in the Colours of a covetous Man; his Wealth aroſe from no Oppreſſion or Uſury, it was the Product of his own Land, which has always been eſteemed as honeſt a Way of being rich, and to proceed as much from the immediate Bleſſing of God, as any whatever: The Ground was his own; he is not ſaid to withhold from the rightful Poſſeſſor by Violence or by Fraud. Thus far then there is no Mark of Covetouſneſs, or of any other Fault: But when he found his Crop to be great, he enlarged his Barns; and this perhaps was his Crime.

But

But where was the Iniquity of this? Does not every Man endeavour that his Barns ſhould be in Proportion to the Product of his Land? May not the moſt charitable Man in the World have a Barn, or build a Barn large enough to receive his Crop, and yet be guiltleſs? Nay, it is evident from hence, that Covetouſneſs, properly ſo called, was not his Fault; for he built his Barn to lay up Stores for many Years, propoſing Reſt and Satisfaction in the Goods already gotten, and intending to trouble himſelf no further about Wealth; he had enough. A covetous Man would rather have turned his Goods into Money, and put it to Uſury, and ſlaved on ſtill for more: Beſides, in the twentieth Verſe, where God is brought in reproving the rich Man for his Folly, there is not one Word ſaid of his building large Barns to receive his Fruits: *Thou Fool, this Night ſhall thy Soul be required of thee.* But if the large Barn had been the Crime, the Conſiſtency of the Parable requires, that the Reproof ſhould have pointed to the Crime, and it ſhould have been ſaid, Thou Fool, this Night ſhall the Lightning from Heaven conſume thy large Barns, or ſomething to this Purpoſe. Further, Neither upon this is it rightly concluded from the Circumſtances of the Pa-

rable, that this rich Man was void of Charity to the Poor: He is repreſented as fully ſatisfied in his Abundance: There had been much more Reaſon to have thought him uncharitable, had he been repreſented as not contented with his Abundance, but ſtill fearful of Poverty and Want; which is often the Caſe, and the Pretence of the rich uncharitable Man. Nor, laſtly, is it reaſonable to limit and confine the Notion of being rich towards God to Works of Charity only; all good Works in Proportion make us rich towards God. St. *Paul* ſpeaks in general of the Richneſs of good Works, and St. *James* of the Richneſs of Faith: And in the Text, to be rich to God does particularly ſignify, to truſt and rely upon his Providence for our Life and Support, in oppoſition to relying on Treaſures of our own heaping up, or large Barns of our own building and filling; as I ſhall ſhew preſently.

Having thus far examined the common Interpretation of the Parable, and ſhewn how much ſhort it falls of our Saviour's true Aim and Intent, I ſhall now endeavour to point out the true Meaning of it, which will lead us into the right Senſe and Underſtanding of the Text.

When

When our Saviour exhorted his Hearers to beware of Covetouſneſs, he ſupported his Advice with this Reaſon, *For a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth:* This Reaſon he illuſtrates and confirms in the following Parable. The Aim then of the Parable is to ſhew, that Wealth is no Security, that it is Folly to pretend to arm ourſelves againſt the Accidents or Caſualties of Life by heaping up Treaſures, which nothing can protect us againſt but the good Providence and Care of our heavenly Father. In this Point all the Circumſtances of the Parable meet; the rich Man is repreſented as flowing in Plenty, ſo that he was neceſſitated to pull down his Barns and Storehouſes in order to enlarge them: This Plenty made him forget God, and vainly imagine that he had a Security in his own Hands againſt all the Calamities of Life: His Riches made him promiſe himſelf many happy Days and Years: In which Confidence he thus expreſſes himſelf, *Soul thou haſt much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Eaſe, eat, drink, and be merry.* This Folly God reproves him for, and checks him in his preſumptuous Security, *Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul ſhall be required of thee; then whoſe ſhall thoſe Things be which*

thou haſt provided? Thou ſhalt dye, and what then must become of thoſe mighty Pledges of thy Security? So little will they avail thee, that they themſelves will fall under the Power of another, never to return to thee again. *So is he*, ſays our Lord, *who lays up Treaſure for himſelf, and is not rich towards God.* Theſe Words being the Moral of this Parable, muſt be expounded ſo as to anſwer the Deſign of the Parable; and therefore to lay up Treaſures for ourſelves, muſt ſignify to lay up Treaſures for our own Security, as if we meant to become thereby the Carvers of our own Fortune: Conſequently, to be rich towards God, being placed in Oppoſition to laying up Treaſures for ourſelves, muſt denote our placing our Confidence and Truſt in him, our endeavouring to procure his Favour and Protection, as knowing that in them only is all our Hope and Stability.

From this Repreſentation it is eaſily collected what is the dangerous Circumſtances attending Riches, which makes them often prove ſo fatal to their Owners, namely, That they beget an irreligious Confidence and Preſumption in the Heart of Man, inclining him to forget God who formed him. A Senſe and Feeling of Want is a conſtant Remembrance of our Dependence, and is

ever

ever calling upon us to look up to him, upon whoſe Mercy and Goodneſs we exiſt. A Life ſpent in theſe Difficulties, and ſupported beyond all the reaſonable Hopes of narrow Circumſtances, ſuggeſts to us every Moment how wonderfully God has brought us on our Way, when we had neither Staff nor Shoes nor Money in our Scrip: Theſe are the natural Thoughts and Suggeſtions of Poverty. But a Man who lives in the midſt of Plenty, and fears no Want, is not apt to think often of the Need he has to be aſſiſted: He that remembers nothing, but that his large Eſtate has ever ſupplied both his Neceſſities and Superfluities, will hardly reflect further, ſo as to come to an Acknowledgment that God has been his Stay ever ſince he fell from his Mother's Womb. This is the common Caſe of Riches; they ſteal the Heart from God, and render it inſenſible to the Duties of Religion, by taking away the Foundation of all Religion, the Senſe of our Dependence on the Providence and Care of Heaven. This made our Lord cry out, *How hardly ſhall a rich Man enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!* This Inſolence, this Pride of Mind, which is the proper Growth of the rich Man's Soil, choaks all the Seeds of Vertue and Holineſs, and leaves no room

for the Plants planted by our heavenly Father to thrive and proſper: Even Charity itſelf, the choiceſt Flower of a rich Garden, flies the Neighbourhood of this poiſonous Weed, and will not take Root by it.

It is this Irreligiouſneſs of Mind, this Diſregard to God and every thing that is good, which are the too common Companions of a plentiful Fortune, that have made Riches to be ſo hardly ſpoken of in Scripture. If you examine particular Places, you will find Regard is ſtill had to this Corruption of Mind. In the Parable of the rich Man and *Lazarus*, it is not eaſy to find upon what Account the rich Man was condemned, as the Caſe is generally ſuppoſed to be ſtated: The rich Man is ſaid to be *cloathed in Purple and fine Linnen; and to fare ſumptuouſly every Day*. He was not covetous it ſeems, he lived anſwerably to his Fortune: His Life is repreſented as a Scene of Eaſe and Pleaſure, but is not taxed with any notable Vice or Enormity: He is ſaid to fare ſumptuouſly, which I take to be a Deſcription of his State and Grandeur, rather than an Imputation of any Vice; for he is not accuſed either of Gluttony or Drunkenneſs. But was he not, you will ſay, uncharitable? for poor *Lazarus* lay at his Door, *deſiring the Crumbs that fell from*

from his Table. This Circumſtance rather ſhews, that the Poor uſed to be fed at his Door. Had the Intent of the Parable been to have repreſented this rich Man as hard to the Poor, it would have been ſaid, that his Servant drove away the Poor from the Door; or at leaſt, when the Poor came, that they were ſent empty away: Neither of which is ſaid; but *Lazarus* is repreſented as feeding upon the Crumbs of the rich Man's Table. And this is the Image given us of their different Conditions in this World: The rich Man ſate down to a ſumptuous Table; the poor Man was glad to feed upon the Crumbs and Scraps that fell from it. The End of theſe Men is well known: *Lazarus* was carried by Angels into *Abraham*'s Boſom; the rich Man was tormented in Hell Flames. What then does the Parable teach us? Why it repreſents to us the dangerous State of great Men, who live without the Fear or Love of God in their Hearts; and the much happier Condition of the Poor, who have their Share of Miſery in this World, which often leads to Glory and Immortality hereafter. If you look forward, you will ſee this is the true Aim of the Parable: When the rich Man applies to *Abraham* for Relief, and finds none; he then petitions for his

his Brethren, that they might be warned againſt the Danger that hung over their Heads, againſt coming into the ſame ſad State with himſelf. Here you may well imagine that he would deſire they ſhould be particularly warned againſt thoſe Crimes which had proved his Ruin. Had he burnt in the Flames for Intemperance or Uncharitableneſs, he would have begged that his Brethren might have been exhorted to fly the Sins that were his Tormentors: But of this nothing is ſaid: He only deſires that *Lazarus* might go in Quality of a Prophet, to teſtify the Truth and Reality of a future State: Which plainly ſhews, that his Condemnation was the Effect of Irreligion and Unbelief: He lived at Eaſe, and God was not in all his Thoughts. To his Requeſt *Abraham* replies, *They have Moſes and the Prophets, let them hear them:* Shewing us again, that the Fault of theſe rich Men was Contempt of the Prophets and Irreligion. The rich Man tacitly owns this Contempt, both for himſelf and his Brethren, by ſaying, *Nay, but if one went from the Dead they will repent:* Which was confeſſing, that they had not Reverence enough for *Moſes* and the Prophets, to repent upon their Authority and Admonition, but wanted ſome greater Motive,

tive, which he thought might be found in the Appearance of one coming from the Grave. From theſe Circumſtances it is evident, that the Purport of the Parable is not to repreſent to us the Heinouſneſs of any one particular Crime for which the rich Man ſuffered; but to ſhew how fatally Riches influence the Mind to Irreligion, and make Men forget God; whilſt the Poor, living in continual Want, have a perpetual Senſe of their Dependence, and do in all their Diſtreſs look up to him of whom cometh their Salvation. This Senſe of Dependence creates in the poor Man a Fear to offend, a Deſire to pleaſe; whilſt the rich Man, wanting, as he thinks, nothing from God, has no Deſire to court his Favour; but grows negligent and remiſs in all the Parts of Religion, from which it is a very eaſy Step to Infidelity.

It is from theſe Conſiderations that the *Love of the World* is ſaid in Scripture to be *Enmity with God.* All Vices are not attended with Hatred and Contempt of God; not all the Vices that are commonly aſcribed to Riches; and therefore the Love of the World, that is Enmity with God, is not to be expounded by Covetouſneſs or Uncharitableneſs, or any other particular Vice; but denotes the rich Man's Temper and Diſpoſition,

ſition, the Habit of Mind that grows out of a plentiful Eſtate: And this indeed is very commonly Enmity with God; inclining Men not only to diſobey his Commands, but, as far as lies in them, to throw him out of the World, and depoſe him from the Throne of Heaven.

To the ſame Purpoſe our Lord ſpeaks, when he tells us, *No Man can ſerve two Maſters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one, and deſpiſe the other: Ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon.* Here our Lord ſpeaks without a Parable, and tells us plainly what it is that makes Wealth to be ſo dangerous a Poſſeſſion; namely, becauſe it is the Rival of God: And if it once get Poſſeſſion of the Mind, it will expell all Truſt and Confidence in God, all Regard to Faith and Religion: *For ye cannot ſerve God and Mammon.*

From what has been diſcourſed upon this Subject, we may learn, where a rich Man ought to place his Guard: If he is not covetous, or uncharitable, if he is not luxurious and intemperate, ſo far it is well: But above all, let him take heed, that the Pride and Inſolence of Mind, too common in plentiful Circumſtances, grow not upon him; the Pride I mean of Self-ſufficiency, as if he

were able to guide and to guard himſelf through the World, and had not ſo much Need of the Care of God over him, as the Poor who enjoy nothing: Let him learn to know, that in Riches are no Security; and that he wants the Protection of Heaven as much as the pooreſt Wretch in the World. A rich Man that has this Senſe as he ought to have, will in Conſequence have the other Vertues proper to his State: He will be gentle, affable, kind and charitable; and his Spirit, in the Height of Fortune, will be adorned with the Meekneſs of the Goſpel of Chriſt. A Man of Senſe need not go far to learn this Submiſſion to God in the higheſt Fortune: Our Saviour's Argument, that follows cloſe after the Text, will teach him the Reaſonableneſs of the Duty: *The Life*, ſays he, *is more than Meat, and the Body is more than Raiment.* The utmoſt Riches can do, upon the largeſt Conceſſions made to them, is to provide Food and Raiment, and ſuch like Neceſſaries and Conveniencies of Life. Put the Caſe then, That by being Maſter of a great Eſtate, you are Maſter of Food and Raiment, and can have them in what Quantity or Quality you pleaſe: What then? Have you leſs Reaſon, upon this Account, to depend upon God, and to implore

his

his Aid? Conſider a little: To what Purpoſe ſerves Food? Is it not for the Support of Life? But can Food ward off Death? Are you, in all your Plenty of Proviſions, one Jot ſecurer againſt Sickneſs, or any Accident that may rob you of your Life, than the pooreſt Man? Will not a Tile from an Houſe kill a rich Man, as well as a Beggar? If this be the Caſe, is it not very abſurd to plume yourſelf, and to think of Security, becauſe of your Plenty, when Life itſelf, which is more than Meat, is ſtill expoſed; and for which you can have no Security, but in the Goodneſs of God? You have many Changes of Raiment, and the Poor has only Rags. What then? Will the Gout or Stone, or burning Fever pay ſuch Reſpect to fine Cloaths as not to approach them? Will Health always attend upon Gold Lace and Embroidery? If it will, you are right to multiply Garments: But if, after all your Care for Raiment, you muſt ſtill depend upon God, as well as the Beggar, for Health and Strength of Body, how ridiculous is the Joy over many Changes of Garments! *Is not the Body more than Raiment?* Since then you muſt truſt God for your Life and Strength, becauſe they are Things which no Care of your own, no Degree of Wealth can

can inſure; had you not even as good truſt him a little farther, and eaſe yourſelf of this unreaſonable Care for the Things of Life? From theſe, and the like Conſiderations, you may ſee, that Dependence upon God is as much the rich Man's Duty and Intereſt, as it is the poor Man's: That to truſt God, and to rely on his Goodneſs, is to be rich towards God; and is that Sort of Riches which will make us eaſy and happy in this Life, and glorious and ever-bleſſed in that which is to come. By theſe Means we may ſtill enjoy our Fortunes; and as our Church has taught us to pray, "We may ſo "paſs through Things Temporal, that we "finally loſe not the Things Eternal."

DISCOURSE XVI.

LUKE xxii. 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how he ſaid unto him, Before the Cock crow, thou ſhalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

THE Fall of St. *Peter* would be a very melancholy Inſtance of human Infirmity, did it not likewiſe ſet before us a ſignal Example of the divine Mercy, and of the Power of Grace triumphing over the Weakneſs of Nature. St. *Peter* ſeems to have had the greateſt Share of natural Courage and Reſolution of any of the Diſciples, and the fulleſt Perſuaſion of Faith. He it was who made the firſt Confeſſion, and ſaid, *Thou art Chriſt the*

Son of the living God; by which he obtained the Promiſe of his Lord, *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*: He it was, who, when his Maſter's Life was aſſaulted, drew the Sword in his Defence, and ſmote off the Servant's Ear; and had left ſtill greater Marks of his Courage and Zeal, had not his Maſter rebuked his Fire, bidding him put up the Sword into its Place again. When our Lord foretold the Flight of his Diſciples, and that all ſhould be offended becauſe of him, the reſt by Silence confeſſed their Fear, and their Shame; *Peter* only ſtood forth, and with a Courage ſeeming to be ſuperior to all Trials, profeſſed, *Though all Men ſhall be offended becauſe of thee, yet will I never be offended.* His Lord again declared unto him, *Verily I ſay unto thee, that this Night, before the Cock crow, thou ſhalt deny me thrice*; but *Peter*, whoſe Heart was conſcious of no Fear, anſwers boldly, *Though I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

As the Time of our Lord's Sufferings drew near, he retired to Prayer, and made choice of *Peter* and others to join with him: But here, oppreſſed with Sleep, they

forgot

forgot themſelves and their Maſter: But ſoon they were awakened with the Noiſe of thoſe who came to apprehend them, and with the Sight of Swords and Staves. *Peter* ſtood to his Defence; and had it been a Cauſe proper for the Deciſion of the Sword, he had at leaſt died with Glory; but he miſtook the Weapons of his Warfare, and knew better how to venture his Life in the Field, than to reſign it at the Call of Conſcience. An evident Sign that natural Courage is not the true Source of Confidence in ſpiritual Trials, in which they only can conquer whoſe Strength is not of Man, but of God. No ſooner were the Hopes of Defence taken away, and the Succours which natural Courage affordeth rendered uſeleſs, but *Peter*'s Reſolution began to fail: He could not indeed totally forget his Love to his Maſter, and therefore he followed him to his Trial; but he followed him, as the Text expreſſes it, *afar off*, and mingled himſelf in the Crowd of Servants who attended the Chief Prieſts and Elders, hoping by that Artifice to paſs unſuſpected of any Acquaintance or Familiarity with the Perſon accuſed. But whether his Fear diſcovered him, which even

by the Concern, it ſheweth to lie conceal-ed often, betrayeth itſelf, or however elſe it happened, he was challenged by a Dam-ſel, who told him, *Thou alſo waſt with Jeſus of Galilee:* *Peter* denies it, and be-ing again ſuſpected, affirms with an Oath, *I know not the Man.* A third Time he is queſtioned, and then, to ſhew his Inno-cence by his Reſentment of their Suſpi-cions, he *began to curſe and to ſwear, ſaying, I know not the Man.* And now it was that *the Cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter*; with a Look, however, full of Tenderneſs and Compaſ-ſion, that ſtruck *Peter* to the Heart, and brought to his Mind his Preſumption and his Baſeneſs: Under this Confuſion he retires from the Preſence of his Maſter, and from the Eyes of the World; and when he thought of himſelf and of his Lord, *he wept bitterly.*

Happy Tears! and bleſſed were the Fruits that followed them! Not long after this the Scene changes again: St. *Peter* ſtands in the Place of his Maſter, before the Tri-bunal of the High-Prieſt, ſummoned to ap-pear for his Doctrine at the Peril of his Life: And now, he who denied Chriſt

when

when he was queſtioned by a Maid-Servant, boldly preaches him before the High-Prieſt and Elders, teſtifying, *that God had raiſed up Jeſus, whom they ſlew, and hanged on a Tree; and had exalted him with his right Hand, to be a Prince, and a Saviour for to give Repentance to Iſrael, and Forgiveneſs of Sins:* And when he had been beaten, and let go, he departed, *rejoicing that he had been counted worthy to ſuffer Shame for the Name of Chriſt:* And thus he continued conſtant in Faith under all Trials and Afflictions; and at laſt laid down his Life for his Maſter, with whom he now reigns in Glory, diſtinguiſhed with the brighteſt Crown of Martyrdom.

This Example of St. *Peter* affords us many uſeful Reflexions, and many excellent Inſtructions for our Conduct and Behaviour in the Courſe of our Lives here; ſome of which I beg Leave to ſuggeſt to you. And,

Firſt, Hence we may learn, that Confidence and Preſumption are very unpromiſing Signs of Stedfaſtneſs and Perſeverance in Religion. Truſt in God is one Thing, and Truſt in ourſelves is another; and there is Reaſon to think that they will differ as much in the

Succeſs that attends them, as they do in the Powers upon which they are founded.

There is a Boldneſs and Intrepidity natural to the Temper of ſome Men, which make them eaſily undertake, and often atchieve, great Things; which give them ſuch Aſſurance and Reliance on themſelves that they overlook the Dangers and Difficulties at which others ſtand amazed, and at the Sight of which they find all their Powers forſake them. But then great Spirits are generally attended with great Paſſions, which by Turns uſurp the Dominion, and leave little Room for Thought or Reflexion; ſo that a cool Head and a warm Heart ſeems to be one of the rareſt Compoſitions in Nature. How applicable ſuch Tempers are to Religion, may be known by conſidering, that the firſt Principles of true Religion are a Fear of God and a Miſtruſt of ourſelves, which will not eaſily inſinuate into a Mind that fears nothing, and is full of Self-Sufficiency. Hence it is that ſome fierce Spirits ſet up for Deſpiſers of Religion, as if even to fear God were too mean a Condeſcenſion in a Man of Courage.

But

But were ſuch Men once entered into the Ways of Holineſs, it may be thought perhaps that the ſame Warmth, which preſſes them on to great Attempts, would ſoon make them eminently virtuous; ſince Courage and Reſolution are the likelieſt Means to carry us to the greateſt Heights in Religion. Such indeed are Chriſtian Courage and Reſolution, which ariſe from a ſure Truſt in God, and a perfect Submiſſion to his Will, which enable us not only to act with Zeal, but to bear the Diſappointments we meet with an unſhaken Firmneſs of Mind. But when Men ſet out upon their own Bottom, they will ſoon be offended, and turn back: Glory and Succeſs are the proper Incitement of human Courage; Reproach and Afflictions the neceſſary Exerciſe of Chriſtian Fortitude. When St. *Peter* was ſurrounded with Swords and Staves, he was nothing diſmayed, his Heart and his Hand went together in the Cauſe of God. But yet he who could fight for his Religion could not ſuffer for it. This ſhews that the Courage of a Chriſtian is very different from that of the natural Man; that it ariſes from other Conſiderations, and is ſupported by other Hopes and

Expectations: And it is in vain for you to promiſe yourſelves a Superiority under Trials and Temptations, unleſs you lay the right Foundation, by imploring the Aid and Aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, whoſe Province only it is to confirm the Faithful to the End.

Secondly, From this Example of St. *Peter* we may learn alſo what little Reaſon there is to promiſe ourſelves Succeſs againſt Temptations which are of our own ſeeking. St. *Peter* had Warning given him, and was told by one, whoſe Word he might have taken, that he was not able to undergo the Trial which he ſeemed ſo much to deſpiſe. But try he would, and learnt to know his own Weakneſs in his Miſcarriage.

God knows our Strength better than we ourſelves do; and therefore, when he has warned us to avoid the Occaſions of Sin, and to fly from the Preſence of the Enemy, it is Preſumption to think ourſelves able to ſtand the Attack, and our Preparations to meet the Danger muſt be vain and ineffectual. When we ſtrive not lawfully, even Victory is diſhonourable, and no Succeſs can juſtify Diſobedience to Orders:

And

And where our Strength is not our own, but is derived to us from the great Captain of our Salvation, it is impoſſible we ſhould proſper whilſt we diſobey his Authority, unleſs we can ſuppoſe that he will enable us to act in Contempt of his Commands. When therefore we court the Dangers and Temptations, which the Spirit of God has warned us to flee from, we fight without Commiſſion, we are no longer the Soldiers of Chriſt, or have any Pretence to expect Support from him in our Undertakings. The Promiſe of the Spirit was given to comfort us in doing the Work of God, and his Aſſiſtance is granted to enable us to perform it. And whilſt we are doing the Work of our Father, we have no Reaſon to doubt of proper Encouragement; but when we ſtep out of the Road of our Duty, and form to ourſelves Deſigns not authorized by the Word of God, what Ground have we to look for the Aid of God's Spirit? which Aid is no where promiſed to enable us to effect whatever our own Hearts prompt us to undertake, but only to encourage our Obedience to the Laws and Precepts of the Goſpel. When God warns us to flee from Temptations, it is ſufficient Evidence to us

that

that we are not able to encounter them, and a clear Intimation of his Will that he intends to aſſiſt us by his Grace, not to meet them, but to avoid them; which of itſelf is a Taſk difficult enough to exerciſe the Courage and Conſtancy of a Chriſtian. When you endeavour to avoid what God has commanded to be avoided, you act under the Aſſurance and Protection of his Grace; but if you face about and dare the Temptation, your Courage grows to be Contumacy and Diſobedience, and you have no Title to the Promiſes of the Goſpel. An Imagination that we are above all Temptations, and may ſafely venture into their Company, is always a dangerous Symptom, and ſhews that ſpiritual Pride and Preſumption have got the upper Hand of Chriſtian Courage and Humility. Men are apt to think that Caution and Fear are only neceſſary for young Beginners; but that eſtabliſhed Virtue is licenſed to take a nearer View of Sin, and may enter its Quarters without any Danger from the Infection: But whence ariſes this Confidence? If from themſelves, it is vain; if from a Dependance upon the experienced Strength of God's Grace, the Concluſion is no where warranted by Scripture; and is a direct Contradiction

diction to St *Paul*'s Inference drawn from the ſame Principles, who thus admoniſhes all Chriſtians; *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Our whole Ability depending upon the Aid of God's Spirit is, in the Apoſtle's Way of Reaſoning, an Argument for Fear and Trembling: And, if he had the Spirit of God, what Spirit muſt they have, who, in Contempt of this Apoſtolical Rebuke, to Preſumption, thus exhort themſelves and others, Be bold and fear not, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do? St. *Paul* did not ſpeak to Babes in Chriſt Jeſus only, but to thoſe alſo who had attained to the Fulneſs of Stature in Chriſt. The beſt Thing the moſt confirmed Chriſtian can ſay for himſelf, is, That God worketh in him both to will and to do; and if even this be a Reaſon for Fear and Trembling, if this, which is your Strength, is likewiſe your Admonition to be cautious and wary, whence can Preſumption grow? For if the Senſe of your Strength in Chriſt Jeſus muſt teach you to be modeſt and humble, and always upon your Guard, what elſe is there that can encourage you to be bold and confident? Let no Man there-

fore

fore think that his Trial is over, or that he is got beyond the Power of Sin and Temptation: The Enemy will watch all your unguarded Moments, and your Security and Preſumption will be his Encouragement to attempt your Ruin: *Watch therefore and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.* And if the Will of God be that your Virtue ſhould be brought to the Trial, if he calls you to the Combat, look up to him for Aid, imploring of his Goodneſs, *that he would with the Temptation alſo make a Way for you to eſcape.*

Thirdly, From the Example of St. *Peter* we may learn how great the Advantages of regular and habitual Holineſs are. Good Chriſtians though they may fall like other Men through Paſſion, or Preſumption, or other Infirmities, yet the Way to their Repentance is more open and eaſy; their Minds not being hardened by Sin, are awakened by the gentleſt Calls, and the Senſe of Virtue revives upon the firſt Motion and Suggeſtions of Conſcience. St. *Peter* fell, and his Fall was very ſhameful; but his Repentance was as ſurpriſing and remarkable as his Fall. Whilſt he was in the Height of his Rage for being ſuſpected to be a Diſciple of Chriſt, whilſt he was abjuring him with Oaths and Imprecations, one Look of his

his Lord laid all the Storm, and melted him into the Tears and Sorrows of Repentance. The ſame Minute ſaw him the moſt audacious Sinner and the moſt humble Penitent; he committed the Fault, and begged Pardon for it, almoſt in the ſame Breath. There was no need of terrifying Judgments to awaken his Mind to a Senſe of his Iniquity: The Eye of his Lord, though full of Compaſſion, was a ſufficient Rebuke; it ſtruck him with a Sorrow not to be diſſembled, and therefore *he went out, and wept bitterly*. St. *Peter's* Caſe is the Caſe of every good Man under the ſame unhappy Circumſtances. The hardened Sinner goes on from Sin to Sin, deſpiſes the Calls of Conſcience, refuſes to hearken to the Judgments of God, and obſtinately periſhes in the Error of his Way: But where there is a Senſe of Virtue and Religion, Sin can never keep Poſſeſſion long; no ſooner does the Paſſion cool, and Conſcience begin to ſpeak, but the Heart travels with Repentance, and feels the Pangs of godly Sorrow. How different were the Calls to Repentance which the Rulers of the *Jews* had upon the Death of Chriſt, and yet how different the Succeſs of thoſe Calls! When he hung upon the Croſs, they ſaw

all

all Nature thrown into Convulſions; the Earth trembled, the Sun was darkened, and the Vail of the Temple was rent in two: Yet ſtill they purſue their Malice, and ſet a Guard upon his Sepulchre, hoping at leaſt that the Grave, ſo aſſiſted, would hold him faſt: But when this failed them, and their own truſty Watch declared to them the Wonder of his Reſurrection, they relented not; but, throwing off all Shame, they ſuborned the Guards to witneſs a Lye, giving out that his Diſciples had ſtolen him away by Night. One compaſſionate Look recovered St. *Peter*, but the *Jews* were not convinced, though one aroſe from the Dead. A good Man may be miſtaken, ſurprized, miſled; but the firſt Returns of Thought, the firſt Interval he has of cool Reflexion ſhews him his Error, and haſtens his Return to the Obedience of Holineſs. This is a great Security: For every Man may ſin; but thoſe only will repent who ſincerely endeavour after Righteouſneſs. The Wicked as they advance in Iniquity do more and more ſubdue their Conſcience, till even Repentance itſelf becomes impoſſible.

Fourthly, You may obſerve that the Sins of the beſt Men are expiated with the greateſt

eſt Senſe of Sorrow and Affliction. It is eaſy for Men, who have been long Strangers to a Senſe of Religion, to argue themſelves into an Unconcernedneſs for their paſt Iniquities; and to imagine, that if they do but purſue their Reſolutions of living virtuouſly for the Time to come, it is of little Moment to trouble themſelves with the Remembrance of what is paſt and gone; ſince God requires nothing but their Amendment, and even Sorrow and Repentance are no farther valuable than as they tend to Reformation. I ſhall not enter into Speculations upon this Subject; let Men enjoy their Reaſonings: But this I ſay, *It is impoſſible* to have a Senſe of Religion, to think of God and ourſelves as we ought to do, without being affected with the deepeſt Sorrow for our Offences. When Men are truly concerned, they do not conſider what they are to get by their Tears, or what Profit their Sorrow will yield: The Soul muſt vent its Grief; and godly Sorrow is as truly the natural Expreſſion of an inward Pain as worldly Sorrow, however they differ in their Cauſes and Objects. St. *Peter*, when he went out and wept bitterly, did not ſtay to conſider whether he ought to weep or no; or to re-

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flect what Uſe his Tears would be to him: His Heart was too full for ſuch Reflexions; he ſaw the Goodneſs of his Lord, and his own Baſeneſs, and his Grief came as naturally into his Eyes as when a Man bemoans the Loſs of a Father or a Mother. Some indeed have learnt how to make a Trade of Repentance, and can balance Sin and Sorrow as exactly as a Merchant does his Accounts: And Repentance is indeed their richeſt Merchandize. But the Goſpel has taught us no ſuch Art: There only we learn how gracious our God is, how much it is our Duty and Intereſt to obey; and from thence we learn how baſe and how miſerable we are when we offend. What is beyond this is the Work of Nature, which will ever ſtart and grow afflicted at the Sight of Miſery, and knows how to lament its own Afflictions without a Guide. When therefore we find ourſelves truly affected with the Senſe of our Sins, and in good Earneſt lament our Diſobedience and Ingratitude to God, we have the beſt Indication, that we can have, that the Spirit of Religion is ſtill alive within us, and that we are not given up to a reprobate obdurate Heart.

Laſtly, There is one Obſervation, of a more general Concern, that naturally offers itſelf upon the View of this Caſe: The Inſtruction of this Example to private Chriſtians is very great; but yet there ſeems to me to be ſomething more intended in the tranſmitting this Hiſtory to all Ages in the ſacred Writings.

The Goſpel was the Work of God; and though we were to receive it by the Hands of Men, yet was our Faith to be founded not in the Strength or Policy of Man, but in the Power and Wiſdom of God: For this Reaſon *God choſe the weak Things of the World to confound the ſtrong*. The Diſciples, upon whom the Weight of the Goſpel was to reſt, and upon whoſe Management the Succeſs ſeemed to depend, were Men of no diſtinguiſhed Characters; their Simplicity and Honeſty were their beſt Commendation: Theſe our Lord elected, well knowing the weaker the Inſtruments were, the more evidently the Hand of God would appear in the mighty Things performed by them. Among theſe St. *Peter* plainly had the greateſt Spirit, and the ſtrongeſt Reſolution; his Readineſs and Vivacity diſtinguiſhed him in every Step; he was the Mouth of the

Apoſtles, and always ready to undertake and execute the Commands of his Lord. If there was any of the Number that could be thought capable of entering into, and managing, ſo great a Deſign as the Propagating a new Religion in the World, it was St. *Peter*: He therefore is called to the Trial. And how able he was of himſelf to encounter the Difficulties that were to attend the Goſpel in every Step, you have already ſeen. Had the Goſpel been left to have been conducted by him merely, it is probable that the Fame of it would not have reached our Times. And yet this ſame Man, not many Weeks after, appears before the Tribunal of the Magiſtrates, preaches to his Judges, and teſtifies that of a Truth Jeſus was the Chriſt, and that whom they ſlew, and hanged on a Tree, God had raiſed from the Dead, and exalted him to the right Hand of his Glory. Whence this mighty Difference? or to what can it be aſcribed, but to that great Spirit for whoſe Coming their Lord commanded them to wait in *Jeruſalem*, and not to enter upon their Office till they ſhould receive Power from on high? If the Goſpel was an Impoſture, and if Chriſt died to riſe no more, what gave this freſh Courage

to *Peter*? Had he more Confidence in a dead Man, than in his Maſter whilſt on Earth? If he had not ſeen Chriſt come from the Grave, nor received the Power of the Spirit, what could move him to expoſe himſelf for the ſake of Chriſt, for whoſe Sake whilſt on Earth, and whilſt the Hopes of his being the Son of God were ſtrong, he dared not to expoſe himſelf?

This plainly ſhews that the Hand of God was with him, and is an Evidence to us that our Faith is the Work of God, and not of Man.

And thus, whether we conſider St. *Peter*'s Caſe as an Inſtruction to ourſelves, it affords us many uſeful Leſſons and many Encouragements to direct and ſupport us in our ſpiritual Warfare; or whether we conſider it in a more general View, and as affecting his Character as he was a Miniſter of the Goſpel, and an Apoſtle of Chriſt Jeſus, it yields us a great Aſſurance and Confidence in our Faith, whilſt through the Weakneſs of the Man we evidently diſcern the Power of God, which wrought effectually with him; ſo that, knowing in whom we have truſted, we need not be aſhamed.

DISCOURSE XVII.

MATTHEW XIV. 1, 2.

At that Time Herod the Tetrarch heard of the Fame of Jeſus, and ſaid unto his Servants, This is John the Baptiſt, he is riſen from the Dead, and therefore mighty Works do ſhew forth themſelves in him.

WHETHER this Thought was firſt ſtarted by *Herod* himſelf, or no, is not very certain: The Accounts given of it by St. *Matthew* and St. *Mark* make it probable that *Herod* was the firſt who ſuppoſed Jeſus to be that *John Baptiſt* riſen from the Dead, whom he had cruelly and wantonly put to Death in Priſon. St. *Luke*'s Account makes the Caſe rather to be, that the ſeveral Reports and Opinions of others concerning Jeſus, either that he was *Elias*,

or one of the old Prophets, or *John the Baptiſt* from the Dead, were brought to *Herod*, and that he was in great Perplexity and Concern about them. But be this as it will, whether he impoſed on himſelf, or was impoſed on by others by this vain and improbable Story, yet evident it is, how far his Imagination was poſſeſſed, and his Reaſon weighed down by guilty Fear; and how eaſily he believed whatever ſeemed to threaten that Puniſhment, which his Conſcience told him was his Due. How came it to paſs, that, whilſt others were bleſſing themſelves with the Hopes of having a great Prophet among them, *Herod* alone was perplexed and diſmayed? or, when there were ſuch various Accounts of this Perſon, ſome ſaying that he was *Elias*, others that he was one of the old Prophets, and others that he was *John the Baptiſt*, how came *Herod* to take up with the moſt improbable Account of all, and for which there was not the leaſt Foundation? The *Jews* had from antient Prophecies, however miſtaken, an Expectation that *Elias* ſhould come, or ſome of the old Prophets; and thoſe who were of that Opinion were in the common Error, which was countenanced by Tradition;

dition, and the prevailing Interpretation of the Prophecies. To their Expectation the Character and Perſon of our Bleſſed Saviour did very well anſwer: He was a Preacher of Righteouſneſs, and mighty in Signs and Wonders: Such was *Elias*, ſuch were the old Prophets: They had read of them, what they now ſaw performed by Jeſus; and, their Perſuaſion being allowed them, that *Elias*, or one of the old Prophets, ſhould come, the Words and Works of Jeſus tended extremely to confirm them in the Opinion that he was the Perſon whom they expected. But with reſpect to *John the Baptiſt* the Caſe is quite otherwiſe; there was no Ground to build this Imagination on; there was neither Tradition nor Prophecy to ſupport it: *John* indeed was a juſt Man, and a Preacher of Righteouſneſs, and had been barbarouſly murdered; and ſo had many before him, who never returned again from their Graves, and what better Reaſon was there to expect that he ſhould? Beſides, ſuppoſe it probable that he was to come, yet ſtill it was improbable that this was the Perſon: Their Characters and Offices were very different; *John* went about baptizing, but we are told expreſly that Jeſus baptized

no Man: Jeſus wrought many Miracles, but of *John* it is recorded in holy Writ that he wrought no Miracle. But *Herod* minded none of theſe Things; he had a Motive that weighed more with him on the other Side, a Motive which ſhut out all Reaſon and Argument: It was his guilty Conſcience told him this was *John the Baptiſt*. He had murdered the holy Man, to pleaſe a lewd Woman; and no ſooner did he hear that there was one in the Country, who wrought Miracles, but he concluded the *Baptiſt* was come from the Grave, armed with Power to take Vengeance for his Iniquities, and his own Wrongs. *This is John the Baptiſt*, ſays *Herod*: *He is riſen from the Dead, and therefore mighty Works do ſhew forth themſelves in him.*

The Uſe I intend to make of this Paſſage of Holy Scripture is to ſet before you ſuch Conſiderations as naturally ariſe from it, and are proper for the Government and Direction of ourſelves.

And, firſt, you may obſerve from hence the great Force and Efficacy of Conſcience.

It is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that if God intended Men for his own Service, and deſigned them for another State of Happineſs and Miſery

Miſery after this Life, according to their good or ill Behaviour in it, that he ſhould make himſelf known to them by ſome clear and plain Manifeſtation; and promulge the Laws, which were to be the Rule of their Obedience, in ſuch Manner that all ſhould know and acknowledge their Duty. Were Men left deſtitute of theſe neceſſary Aſſiſtances, there could be no Equity in requiring Obedience, no Juſtice in puniſhing Diſobedience. There are many Demonſtrations to be had of the Exiſtence of a Deity from the Works of Nature, and from the Operations of our own Minds: But the plaineſt of theſe Proofs do ſometimes eſcape the lower Part of Mankind, who, being conſtantly taken up in the ſervile Employments of Life, do not exerciſe their Reaſon ſo far as to come to the Concluſion, which is but one Remove diſtant from the Objects they every Day converſe with. And though, as the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks, *the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament ſheweth his handy Work*; though *Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night ſheweth Knowledge*, yet ſome there are, who, for want of Attention, hear not this ſtill Voice of Nature, and are ſlow to apprehend the Glory

Glory which the Heavens declare, or to diſcover the Hand of the Creator in the Works of the Firmament which they every Day behold. But then there is an internal Proof of a Deity ariſing from Conſcience, and the Reflection of the Mind upon the Good or Evil we do, which amounts to the fulleſt Declaration of the Power of God, and is the completeſt Promulgation of his Law to Mankind that can be deſired or expected. In all civil Caſes a King is ſufficiently proclaimed, and a Law is ſufficiently promulged, when either is done according to Cuſtom in ſome publick and ſolemn Manner; for, it being impoſſible to give every Man concerned particular Notice, the Neceſſity of the Caſe requires that every Man ſhould at his Peril take Notice of the publick Declaration. But, with reſpect to the Authority of God, and the common Laws of Morality, ſuch Care is taken, that the Promulgation is made at every Man's own Door, nay, in his very Heart. The Senſe which Men have of Good and Evil, the Hopes and Fears which naturally ariſe in conſequence of the Good or Ill they do, ſuch Demonſtrations, and ſo homely applied to every Man's Underſtanding, of the Obe-

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dience owing to a ſuperior Being, that nothing can invalidate.

As Speculation helps us to other Proofs of the Power and Authority of our Maker, ſo does it help ſome alſo to get rid of them. It is an eaſy Matter for a Man of a ſubtle Wit to refine ſo far on any Subject, till there ſhall be hardly any Thing left for the Mind to reſt on with Satisfaction and Aſſurance. But this Proof of a Superior Being, to whom we are accountable, which dwells in every Man's Breaſt, no Art or Subtilty can ever expell. As long as Men continue to judge of the Good and Evil of their Actions, as long as ſuch Reflexions are attended in the Innocent with Peace and Satisfaction of Mind, and in the Guilty with Fear and Anxiety; ſo long it will be plain that God hath not left himſelf without Witneſs, but that there are as many Evidences of his Power and Authority as there are rational Beings in the World: And there is this peculiar to this Evidence, that it is ſtrongeſt and moſt irreſiſtible in thoſe who in Intereſt are moſt concerned to ſuppreſs it. The Innocent have little Temptation to plead to the Juriſdiction of the Court; they are the Guilty who want that and other

Artifices to decline the Power of the Judge: But, in the preſent Caſe, the Fears which ſurround the Guilty are ſo many undoubted Proofs and Records of the Judge's Authority; and his Mind, conſcious of all thoſe Fears, ſpeaks to him in the Language which *Feſtus* uſed to St. *Paul*; *Haſt thou appealed unto Cæſar? Unto Cæſar ſhalt thou go.*

Secondly, In the ſame Manner the Moral Law is promulged to every rational Creature: The Work of the Law is written in the Heart, as the Conſcience beareth Witneſs, and the Thoughts, which either accuſe or excuſe. The Promulgation, in this Caſe, is ſtronger than that of any human Laws, which, how publickly and ſolemnly ſoever they are declared at firſt, are often worn out by Length of Time, or grow dark and obſcure, and ſtand in Need of an authoritative Expoſition to ſilence the Contentions ariſing from the different Acceptations of the Rule. But here the Law is renewed to every Man, and the Senſe and Meaning of it ſo preſerved, that nothing but great Ability and Skill, joined with little Honeſty, can pervert or obſcure it; and then only for a Time; ſince the Rebukes of Conſcience will ſooner or later reſtore the true

Senſe to the Law, which was darkened by the Shades of falſe Reaſon ſerving the Inclinations of a corrupted Heart. It would grieve an honeſt Man to ſee how the plaineſt Laws have been treated by corrupt Caſuiſts, who, to ſerve the vile Purpoſes of themſelves or others, have made the Commandment of God of none Effect by their Traditions; who have played Rule againſt Rule, and Duty againſt Duty, till both have been loſt. This might be ſhewn in every Caſe, but in none more apparently than in the Inſtance which the Text furniſhes of the Obligation of an Oath, which is made to bind, or not to bind, juſt as the corrupt Purpoſes require. But tho' theſe Daubings with untempered Mortar ſerve often to deceive the Simple, and to hide their plain Duty from their Eyes; yet when they come to reflect cooly upon their paſt Actions, Conſcience proves a far honeſter Caſuiſt, and pulls off the thin Diſguiſe; and the Man trembles at the Remembrance of thoſe very Things which he committed under the Pretence of a religious Care and Diſpoſition. *Herod*, it ſeems, had promiſed with an Oath to give the Daughter of *Herodias* whatſoever ſhe would aſk; and tho'

tho' he was troubled when ſhe demanded the Head of *John the Baptiſt*, yet, as it is particularly remarked by the Evangeliſt, *for his Oath's Sake, and them which ſat with him at Meat, he commanded it to be given her.* Happy Hypocrite! how ſerenely does he dip his Hands in guiltleſs Blood, and how calmly does he ſit under the Comfort of a conſcientious Regard to his Oath! But ſee, the Scene is quickly changed, *Herod* is alarmed with the Fame of one who wrought Miracles in the Country: He ſtarts at the News; he cries out, *This is John the Baptiſt, he is riſen from the Dead.* This Senſe of Good and Evil, which is natural to rational Minds, and is thus guarded againſt falſe and corrupt Interpretations by the Power of Conſcience, is a great Juſtification of the Goodneſs and Equity of God, in taking Care to promulge his Laws ſufficiently to all who are bound to obey them, and to make their Duty clear and evident to them; without which, we ſhould not be able to diſcern him to be the righteous Judge of the World, in which Character we are chiefly concerned to know him.

Thirdly, We may obſerve from hence, what Care the wiſe Author of our Nature has

has taken, not only to manifeſt himſelf and his Laws to us, but likewiſe to ſecure our Obedience, and thereby our eternal Happineſs and Welfare. It is thought a great Diſadvantage to Religion, that it has only ſuch diſtant Hopes and Fears to ſupport it; and it is true, that the great Objects of our Hopes and Fears are placed on the other Side the Grave, whilſt the Temptations to Sin meet us in every Turn, and are almoſt conſtantly preſent with us. But then to balance this it muſt be conſidered, that tho' the Puniſhments and Rewards of Religion are at ſuch a Diſtance, yet the Hopes and Fears are always preſent, and influence the Happineſs of our Lives here, as much, and often much more, than any other Good or Evil which can befal us. The Peace of Mind which flows from doing Right, the Fear, the Anxiety, the Torment which attend the Guilty, will inevitably determine the Condition of Men to Happineſs or Miſery even in this Life. And no Man, whatever his preſent Contempt for Religion may be, can be ſecure that he is not by his Wickedneſs drawing down on himſelf the greateſt Miſery that Man is capable of ſuſtaining. As little as you think now of the

the Conſequence of your Iniquity, a very little Time, or a very trivial Accident, may open the Paſſage to other Reflexions. The Sons of *Jacob* had no Remorſe when they ſold their Brother to be a Slave; they had delivered themſelves from a fooliſh Fear they had entertained, that he would one Day be greater than they, and their Caſe was much mended by the Riddance they had of him: But the very firſt Misfortune that befel them, a little rough Uſage in a ſtrange Country, awakened their guilty Fears, *and they ſaid one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our Brother, in that we ſaw the Anguiſh of his Soul when he beſought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this Diſtreſs come upon us.* Misfortunes may befal the Good as well as the Evil, for righteous Men have no Promiſe to ſecure them in this Life againſt the common Calamities incident to it; but then, under the ſame Circumſtances, there is a mighty Difference in their Sufferings, ariſing from the different Reflexions their ſeveral Caſes afford. The innocent Man, who finds nothing to charge himſelf with as the Cauſe of his Calamity, ſubmits to it as to an Accident of Life, to which he always knew

knew himſelf ſubject, or as a Diſpenſation of the Providence of God towards him, whoſe Kindneſs he has no Reaſon to miſtruſt: But when any Calamity overtakes the Sinner, and ſetting aſide at preſent what his Sins may deſerve, even as a Man he is ſubject to the Caſualties of Life; and, whenever they overtake him, will it be poſſible for him to think that they are not the Puniſhment of thoſe Sins which, he is conſcious, have deſerved them? And what Weight muſt this add to his Woe? how tormenting muſt the Thought be, that all his Sufferings are Effects of God's Wrath, and the Preſage of greater Woe to come? Innocence may ſometimes ſteal a Man from the Senſe of his Pain, and his Peace of Mind make him forget the Sorrow and Affliction of his Heart: But Guilt has no reſting Place; it raiſes every Faculty of the Soul to increaſe the preſent Miſery. How does the Memory of what is paſt, and the Fear of what is to come, give an Edge and Sharpneſs to Affliction? How does the Imagination work to paint in all the Colours of Terror the ſad Doom that is expected? It is this only that renders the Afflictions of Life truly inſupportable; for *the Spirit of a Man*

will ſuſtain his Infirmity, but a wounded Spirit who can bear? So that, if we conſider the Caſe fairly, we ſhall find that tho' the final Reward of Virtue, and Puniſhment of Vice, are reſerved to another Time and Place; yet there are ſuch Rewards and Puniſhments annexed to them here, and which have their Foundation in the very Frame and Conſtitution of our Minds, as are ſufficient to determine the Choice of a wiſe or reaſonable Man. And if ſome, who pretend to Doubts and Uncertainties concerning a future State, are ſerious, let them conſider, whether that Defect, as they ſuppoſe, in the Foundation of Religion be not ſupplied by what we now ſpeak of: For, were they ever ſo certain of a future State, their Duty would conſiſt in thoſe very Things which their own Reaſon requires of them, and which are abſolutely neceſſary to the Peace of their Minds, upon which all their Happineſs depends. Allow them then their Doubts, will the Conſequence be, that they may ſafely go contrary to their own Reaſon, and the Meaſures of their preſent Happineſs? How then does this Uncertainty affect the Practice of Virtue, ſince the Certainty requires nothing of us but what our Reaſon and preſent Intereſt will teach us without

without it. And this ſhews how effectually God has laid before us the Knowledge of his Law, together with proper and ſufficient Motives to ſecure our Obedience.

To conclude then: As you value the Uſe of that Reaſon which diſtinguiſhes you from the Creatures of a lower Rank, as you value the Comforts of this Life, and the Glories of the next (and, if theſe Arguments will not weigh, there is nothing more to add) take heed to preſerve Innocence and Virtue, which fill up the Character of that Godlineſs, which, the Apoſtle tells us, *is great Gain, having the Promiſe of this Life, and of that which is to come.*

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ROMANS vi. 21.

What Fruit had ye then in thoſe Things whereof ye are now aſhamed? for the End of thoſe Things is Death.

THOUGH the Hopes introduced by the Goſpel of Chriſt are in themſelves fitted to ſupport and encourage Virtue and true Religion, and are only to be truly enjoyed by thoſe who make a Title to them by the Innocency of their Lives; yet they have been perverted to very ill Purpoſes by ſuch as, hating to be reformed by the Precepts of the Goſpel, are willing nevertheleſs to put their Sins under the Protection of the glorious Promiſes contained in it. This Policy prevailed ſo ſoon in the Church, that we find the Apoſtle ſtating the Pretence, and rejecting it with Indignation, in the firſt

Verſes of this Chapter: *What ſhall we ſay then? Shall we continue in Sin that Grace may abound? God forbid: How ſhall we that are dead to Sin live any longer therein?* In the Chapter before this of the Text, he ſets forth the exceeding great Benefits we receive thro' Jeſus Chriſt: That *being juſtified by Faith, we have Peace with God.* That *God commendeth his Love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners Chriſt died for us.* That *being juſtified by his Blood, we ſhall be ſaved from Wrath thro' him.* That *as by one Man's Diſobedience many were made Sinners; ſo by the Obedience of one ſhall many be made righteous.* To prevent the Uſe which ill-diſpoſed Men were ready to make of this great Goodneſs of God towards Sinners, imagining their Iniquities to be privileged, ſince ſo much Grace had been extended to them, the Apoſtle in this Chapter enters into the Queſtion, Whether the Hopes of the Goſpel are reconcileable to a Continuance in Sin; and ſhews by many Arguments, drawn from the Profeſſion, the State, and the Condition of a Chriſtian, that a State of Grace and a State of Sin are as inconſiſtent as Life and Death: ſince every Chriſtian is *buried* with Chriſt *by Baptiſm into Death; that, like as Chriſt was raiſed up from the Dead by*

the

the Glory of the Father, even ſo we alſo ſhould walk in Newneſs of Life. From theſe Reaſons he proceeds to others, not of leſs Moment, appealing to the Senſe of Conſcience and the Voice of Reaſon againſt the preſumptuous Conceit which made the Son of God the Miniſter of Sin, and the Goſpel to give Countenance to the Iniquities of which Nature was ever aſhamed, and againſt which the common Reaſon of Mankind had paſſed Sentence of Condemnation: *What Fruit had ye then in thoſe Things whereof ye are now aſhamed? For the End of thoſe Things is Death.*

Theſe Words will ſuggeſt to our Conſideration the following Particulars.

Firſt, That the Shame and Remorſe which attend upon Sin and Guilt ariſe from the natural Impreſſions on the Mind of Man.

Secondly, That the Expectation of Puniſhment for Sin is the Reſult of the Reaſon given unto us.

Thirdly, That theſe common Notions are the Foundation of all Religion, and therefore muſt be ſuppoſed and admitted in Revealed Religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

Firſt, That the Shame and Remorſe which attend upon Sin and Guilt ariſe from the

natural Impreſſions on the Mind of Man.

It is certain from Experience that we can no more direct by our Choice the Senſations of our Mind, than we can thoſe of the Body: When the Fire burns, Fleſh and Blood muſt feel Pain; and a rational Mind compelled to act againſt its own Conviction muſt ever grieve and be afflicted. Theſe natural Connexions are unalterably fixed by the Author of Nature, and eſtabliſhed to be Means of our Preſervation. We are taught by the Senſe of Pain to avoid Things hurtful or deſtructive to the Body; and the Torments and Anxiety of Mind, which follow ſo cloſe and ſo conſtantly at the Heels of Sin and Guilt, are placed as Guardians to our Innocence, as Centinels to give early Notice of the Approach of Evil, which threatens the Peace and Comfort of our Lives. If we are perfect Maſters of the Senſations of our Mind, if Reflection be ſo much under Command, that when we ſay, Come, it cometh, when we ſay, Go, it goeth, how is it that ſo many ſuffer ſo much from the uneaſy Thoughts and Suggeſtions of their own Hearts, when they need only ſpeak the Word and be whole? Whence the Self-Conviction, the Self-Condemnation of Sinners; whence the fore-

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boding Thoughts of Judgment to come, the ſad Expectations of divine Vengeance, and the Dread of future Miſery, if the Sinner has it in his Power to bid theſe melancholy Thoughts retire, and can when he pleaſes ſit down enjoying his Iniquities in Peace and Tranquility?

Theſe Conſiderations make it evident that the Pain and Grief of Mind which we ſuffer from a Senſe of having done ill, flow from the very Conſtitution of our Nature, as we are rational Agents. Nor can we conceive a greater Argument of God's utter Irreconcileableneſs to Sin, than that he has given us ſuch a Nature that we can never be reconciled to it ourſelves. We never like it in others where we have no Intereſt in the Iniquity, nor long approve of it in ourſelves when we have. The Hours of cool Reflection are the Sinner's Mortification, for Vice can never be happy in the Company of Reaſon; which is the true Cauſe why profligate Sinners fly to any Exceſs that may help them to forget themſelves, and hide them from the Light of Reaſon, which, whenever it ceaſes to be the Glory of a Man, will neceſſarily become his Shame and Reproach. No Vice is the better for being found in the Company of Intemperance, but becomes more odious in

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the Sight of God and Man. And yet how often does Vice fly to Intemperance for Refuge? which ſhews what miſerable Company Sinners are to themſelves, when they can be content to expoſe themſelves to the Contempt of all about them, merely for the Sake of being free from their own Cenſure for a Seaſon. Were it in the Power of Men to find any Expedient to reconcile their Reaſon to their Vices, they would not ſubmit to the hard Terms of parting with their Reaſon for the ſake of being at eaſe with their Vices. But there is no Remedy; as long as we have the Power of thinking, ſo long muſt we think ill of ourſelves when we do Ill. The only Cure for this Uneaſineſs is to live without Thought; for we can never enjoy the Happineſs of a Brute, till we have ſunk ourſelves into the ſame Degree of Underſtanding.

It may be ſaid, I know, that there have been ſome profligate Sinners who have diſcovered no Uneaſineſs upon the Account of their Guilt, but have gone through a Life of proſperous Wickedneſs with great Shew of outward Peace and Tranquility: I know too, that there have been Inſtances of Men who could play with Fire, and be very familiar with it, without ſhewing any Senſe of Pain:

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But neither will the Art of one be accepted as an Argument againſt the Senſe of Feeling, nor the Obdurateneſs of the other be admitted as a Proof againſt the natural Senſe of a rational Mind. Great wicked Men are often loſt in a perpetual Succeſſion of Buſineſs and Pleaſure, and have no Reſpite for Reflection. The poor idle Sinner ſeeks Eaſe in Intemperance: The more proſperous is kept at an unhappy Diſtance from himſelf by living in a Crowd, and having his Hours filled up with Buſineſs, Ceremony, or Pleaſure; and both equally live, with reſpect to themſelves and their own Condition, in one continued Lethargy. But ſuch Inſtances as theſe are of no Conſequence in determining the general Caſe of Mankind; eſpecially conſidering that even theſe are laying up in ſtore for themſelves ſad Materials for Reflection whenever the Seaſon of Reflection overtakes them; and that, ſhould they ever be deſerted by Buſineſs and Pleaſures, inſtead of being Objections to the general Senſe of Mankind under the Terrors of Guilt, they may ſeem to be the moſt miſerable Examples of it. Theſe Obſervations will receive an additional Strength by conſidering,

Secondly,

Secondly, That the Expectation of Puniſhment for Sin is the Reſult of the Reaſon given unto us. *The End of thoſe Things is Death.*

There are no certain Principles from which we can infer the Nature and Sort of Puniſhment deſigned by God for Sinners; and as Reaſon has left us in the Dark in this Particular, ſo neither has Revelation clearly diſcovered this Secret of Providence. The Repreſentations of Scripture upon this Head are metaphorical; the Images are ſtrong and lively, full of Horror and Dread, and lead us to this certain Concluſion, That endleſs Miſery will be the Lot of the Unrighteous: But they do not lead us to a Solution of all the Enquiries which an inquiſitive Mind may raiſe upon this Occaſion. We read of the *Fire that never goes out*, of the *Worm that never dies*, both prepared to prey upon the Wicked to all Eternity: But what this Fire is, what this Worm is, that ſhall for ever torment, and never deſtroy the Wicked, we are no where informed. Among the antient Heathens we find Variety of Opinions, or, to ſpeak more properly, of Imaginations, upon this Subject; and though none of them can make any Proof in their own Behalf, yet

they all prove the common Ground upon which they ſtand, The natural Expectation of future Puniſhment for Iniquity. The Atheiſtical Writers of Antiquity entertain themſelves with expoſing the vulgar Opinions of their Time; and the Unbelievers of our Time have trodden in their Steps, and pleaſed themſelves mightily with dreſſing up the various and uncertain Imaginations of Men upon this Subject. But what is this to the great Point? If Nature has rightly inſtructed us in teaching us to expect Puniſhment for our Sins, what ſignifies it how far Men have been miſtaken in determining the Kinds of Puniſhment that are in Reſerve for Sinners? Let the Learning of the *Egyptians* paſs for Superſtition, and the Wiſdom of the *Greeks* for Folly; yet what has the Senſe of Nature to do with them, which teaches us to expect Puniſhment for Sin from the Hand that made us? And when once the Time comes in which that Hand ſhall exert itſelf, this we may be ſure of, that the Sinner will find no further Subject for Laughter and Diverſion. Men think they gain a great Point by bringing plauſible Reaſons againſt the common Notions of future Puniſhment; But ſuppoſe theſe Notions

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to be indeed Miſtakes, yet if it remains certain from the Light of Reaſon, as well as of Revelation, that God will puniſh Sin, what does the Cauſe gain by this Argument? Will you ſuppoſe that God intends to puniſh Wickedneſs, and yet that he has no poſſible Way to do it? Where lies the Defect? Is it Want of Wiſdom to contrive proper Means for the Puniſhment of Sin, or, is it Want of Power to put them in Execution? If he wants neither the one nor the other, we have nothing to enquire after in this Caſe, but, What his Will is; and of that he has given us ſuch Evidence, that we can never loſe Sight of it as long as we continue to be reaſonable Creatures.

The Power of Conſcience which every Man feels in himſelf, the Fear that purſues every Sin, that haunts the moſt ſecret and moſt ſucceſsful Offenders, are great Evidences of the common Expectation of a Judgment to come. For why does the Sinner fear, whom no man ſuſpects? Why does he ſit joyleſs over the Gains of his Iniquity, whilſt all around him are congratulating his Proſperity, and know nothing of the dark Contrivances by which he obtained it? What is that Spirit in Man, and how inſtructed, that can bear up againſt natural Evils and Infirmities, but

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ſinks under the Wounds of Conſcience, the Grief of which no Medicine can aſſuage, the Torment of which no Courage can endure? But I need not preſs the Argument any farther, the Fact is not diſputed: It is allowed on all Hands, that there is a general Expectation of future Judgment; but this, we are told, is the Effect of Weakneſs and Superſtition, and of Fear where there is no Cauſe of Fear. The Queſtion then is, Whether this common Senſe of Nature is derived from Weakneſs and Infirmity of Mind, or is indeed the Reſult of right Reaſon.

Now, if the Opinion that prevails in the World, that Sin ſhall be puniſhed, is the mere Effect of Weakneſs and Superſtition, the Opinion advanced in direct Oppoſition to it muſt needs be well founded, and capable of being ſupported by good Reaſons. Let us hear then what Reaſon can be offered in Support of the oppoſite Opinion, That Sin ſhall not be puniſhed. Now, whatever can be ſaid in Maintenance of this Aſſertion muſt reſolve itſelf into one or other of theſe Propoſitions; either, That Sin does not deſerve to be puniſhed; or, That God has no Means of puniſhing it.

As to the firſt, No one has yet been found to be an Advocate for Wickedneſs: Even thoſe who ſeem unwilling to admit a State of future Rewards and Puniſhments, have never, that I know, made Uſe of this Plea, That Sin deſerves no Puniſhment: On the Contrary, the only Reaſon why they think Sin will not be puniſhed hereafter, is, becauſe they have no Notion of any State after this. Could they be perſuaded of this, they would not want to be told what the Fate of Sinners muſt be in another World. And it is worth obſerving, that all, who believe another State after Death, agree in believing that Sin ſhall be puniſhed in it; and that all, who hope to eſcape Puniſhment for their Sins, hope utterly to be deſtroyed by Death, and never to ſee Life again: So that, as to the Merit of Sin, there is but one Opinion among Men, that it deſerves to be puniſhed, tho' ſome perſuade themſelves there is no Place in which it can be puniſhed.

It being ſuppoſed, then, that this Propoſition, Sin deſerves to be puniſhed, is a Maxim agreed by the common Reaſon of Mankind; it is evidently a Reaſon leading to this Concluſion, That Sin ſhall be puniſhed.

puniſhed: For what Reaſon can be aſſigned why that ſhould not be done, which our Reaſon tells us is fit to be done? What ſhould move God to act contrary to that which he himſelf has ſhewn us to be proper, and becoming his Wiſdom and Juſtice, by the Light of that Reaſon with which he has endowed us? What can be ſaid to juſtify him in informing our Judgments that Sin ought to be puniſhed, if he has determined in his own Mind never to puniſh it? It muſt be great Want of Power or Juſtice in God not to puniſh Iniquity, after he has ſo ſtrongly declared to every Man's Underſtanding the Fitneſs of doing it.

Let us then conſider the latter Propoſition, and ſee, Whether God has any Means of puniſhing Sin. And it is upon this Propoſition that all the Hopes of Impunity are built: Not that all who hope for Impunity are ſo abſurd as to ſuppoſe that God wants Power to puniſh the Wicked, if he thinks fit to do it: But they do ſuppoſe, That, by his Purpoſe in the Creation of Man, Man has no Relation to any State of Being but in this Life only; that when he dies, all his Hopes and Fears die with him; and that he is no farther

capable of any Senſe, either of Pleaſure or of Pain.

But by what Principles of Reaſon are Men led into this Suppoſition? That God might have provided another State after this, and ordained Men to live in it either happily or miſerably according to their Deſerts, no one can doubt who does not doubt of the Being of a God. If he has ordered it otherwiſe, it was becauſe it ſeemed beſt to his Wiſdom: But how could it ſeem beſt to his Wiſdom to leave no Means for making a Diſtinction between Virtue and Vice, by a ſuitable Diſtribution of Rewards and Puniſhments, and yet to teach us, by that Reaſon which he has given us, that it is highly ſuitable to his Wiſdom and Juſtice to make ſuch Diſtinction? That he does not make the Diſtinction in this World is evident to Eyeſight: We ſee the Wicked flouriſh and proſper, and the Righteous ſtruggling with Sorrows and Afflictions; of one Sort many live to a good old Age, and no Harm happeneth unto them; of the other Sort many die in the Flower of their Youth, and go down to the Grave in Sorrow: And if after this Scene nothing remains, then is there no Juſtice with the Moſt High; the Wicked

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have the Advantage, and the Righteous has juſt Cauſe of complaining, that *he cleanſed his Heart in vain, and waſhed his Hands in Innocence.* But can this be agreeable to his Wiſdom, who Himſelf has taught us to think it diſagreeable to all the Rules of Wiſdom and Juſtice? Is it poſſible to ſuppoſe that a God of Truth and Juſtice ſhould teach us thoſe Leſſons of Juſtice which he never intended to fulfil? that he ſhould train us up in the Expectation of Rewards and Puniſhments, and purpoſe never to diſpenſe them? If this be, as it is, very abſurd, the Conſequence muſt be, that he *has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs, and give to every Man according to his Works.* You ſee then that the common Senſe and Expectation of Mankind, with reſpect to the Rewards and Puniſhments of another Life, is ſo far from being the Effect of Weakneſs and Superſtition, that it is the immediate Reſult of that Reaſon which God has given us: So ſtrong a Reſult is it from our Reaſon, that it is not poſſible to juſtify God and the Methods of his Providence by the Reaſon which he has given us, without maintaining the Certainty of a future State, in which

Sin ſhall be puniſhed, and Righteouſneſs rewarded.

Thoſe of a contrary Opinion may have perhaps ſome Notion of an overruling Fate and Neceſſity to which all Things are ſubject; or, if they go farther, and conceive that there is a rational Being at the Head of Nature, who is Author and Governor of all Things, yet can they hardly allow him any thing but Will, and Power, and Underſtanding; for moral Attributes can never be diſcovered in the Deity by thoſe who leave no Room for the Exerciſe of them, or rather who introduce a Sort of Government into the World inconſiſtent with all moral Attributes and Perfections. We are moſt certainly, if we can judge any Thing from our own Feeling and Conſciouſneſs, accountable Creatures; all our Notions of Right and Wrong, of Juſtice and Equity, all our Thoughts, Reflections, and Forebodings of Mind conſpire to fix the Expectation upon us, that one Day we muſt give Account of ourſelves and our Doings. Our natural Notions of God point out to us our Judge; on our own Part we find Reaſon and Freedom, which makes us fit Subjects of Judgment; on the Part of God we find Wiſdom, and Mercy, and Juſtice,

and every other Perfection that may adorn the Judge of the Univerſe: And if after all we are not to be judged, there muſt be ſomething very wrong in theſe Notions of Mankind. We cannot be miſtaken in thoſe relating to ourſelves, thoſe we feel to be true: The Miſtake then muſt be charged on our Notions of the Deity, and we muſt ceaſe to think Him a moral Agent, at whoſe Hands no Juſtice is to be expected: We muſt ceaſe to think him good, who has tormented us in vain with the Fears of Futurity, and deluded us with falſe Hopes of a better Life; but has not himſelf ſo much Regard to Virtue or Vice as to anſwer either our Hopes or our Fears. Judge now whether the Expectations of Futurity are the Dreams of Superſtition, or the neceſſary Reſult of Thought and Reaſon. But we have one Step more to take, and to ſhew,

Thirdly, That theſe common Notions are the Foundation of all Religion, and therefore muſt be ſuppoſed and admitted in Revealed Religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

Some there have been, who, finding no Hopes for Impunity to Sinners under the Light of Reaſon and Nature, have taken

Shelter in Revelation; not deſiring to correct and reform their Vices, but to enjoy them, and yet to hide them from the Wrath to come. Theſe are great Extollers of the Mercy and Goodneſs of God diſplayed in the Goſpel, great Aſſertors of the extenſive and unbounded Merits of the Blood of Chriſt; ſo far as to think it a Reproach to their Saviour for any one to teach, that the Hopes of Chriſtians may be deſtroyed for Sin, ſince Chriſt has died to make an Atonement for it. Such as theſe are much pleaſed with the Thought, that they do great Honour to God, by opening to the World the inexhauſtible Treaſures of his Mercy, the Attribute in which he delights; and think they have ſome Merit and Service to plead on Account of ſuch pious Labour. They imagine they pay great Regard to our Redeemer, and are the only true Believers in the Efficacy of his Death; the Virtue of which was ſo great as to draw out the Sting of Sin, and leave all the Pleaſures of it behind to be enjoyed by the World.

But would theſe men conſider, they would find that they are offering up to God the Sacrifice of Fools, whilſt they diveſt him of Wiſdom and Juſtice, and all other moral Attributes, in Compliment to his Mercy;

and repreſent him to the World as a good-natured, indolent, inactive Being, unconcerned at what paſſes among his Creatures, and prepared to receive to equal Degrees of Favour the Righteous and the Sinner. The Image of ſuch a Being as this carries with it no Terror like to that which ariſes from the Character of a Tyrant and Oppreſſor, and therefore does not equally ſhock the Minds of Men: But if we examine to the Bottom, ſuch a Being is as void of Morality as a Tyrant. For Morality conſiſts in a juſt Diſtinction of Good and Evil, and in treating both according to the Rules of Equity: But he who is equally good to the Righteous and the Unrighteous, makes as little Diſtinction between them as he who is equally ſevere to both. One is a good-natured, immoral Being, the other a cruel one, but both equally void of Juſtice and Morality. This is the Honour done to God by aſcribing to him a blind Mercy, that knows no Diſtinction between the Good and the Evil. And like to it is the Honour done to our Bleſſed Redeemer by the forementioned Doctrines, which do in Truth make the Son of God to be the Miniſter of Sin, and eſtabliſh the Kingdom of Darkneſs upon the Merits of the Death of Chriſt.

It is beſide my preſent Purpoſe to ſhew how inconſiſtent theſe Notions are with the true Doctrine of the Goſpel; and yet I cannot ſatisfy myſelf without obſerving, that all the Precepts, all the Repreſentations of Scripture, all the Hopes and Fears propoſed to Chriſtians, teach us another Leſſon, and confirm to us this great Article of all Religion, *That God hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteouſneſs.*

This is the Goſpel Doctrine; nor can a true Revelation poſſibly teach otherwiſe, for God cannot contradict himſelf, nor gainſay by his Prophets that common Light of Reaſon which he has planted in Men to be their Guide and Director. Natural Religion is the Foundation and Support of Revelation, which may ſupply the Defects of Nature, but can never overthrow the eſtabliſhed Principles of it; which may caſt new Light upon the Dictates of Reaſon, but can never contradict them. I cannot liſten to Revelation but in conſequence of the natural Notion I have of God, of his Being, his Wiſdom, Power, and Goodneſs: Deſtroy then the Principles of Reaſon, and there is no Room left for Revelation. I ſee and feel the Difference between Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice: What Spirit muſt that be which teaches me that there is

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no ſuch Difference? Shall I believe it to be a Spirit come from God, when I know that the Spirit he has placed within me ſpeaks the contrary? In which Caſe there is only this Choice, either to diſown God for my Creator, or to reject the Spirit which contradicts the Law of my Creation, and the Light of Reaſon which God has placed in the Minds of Men.

From this Way of Reaſoning then it is evident that, if the Expectation of Rewards and Puniſhments for Virtue and Vice is the Reſult of Reaſon, and of the common Light of Nature, it is impoſſible that it ſhould be ſuperſeded by any Revelation: For if God has taught the World that Sin deſerves to be puniſhed, can he be ſo inconſiſtent as to teach the contrary? or to aſſure us that although it be highly becoming his Wiſdom and Juſtice to puniſh Sin, yet he means to have no Regard to Wiſdom and Juſtice, but to let ſin go unpuniſhed? He might as well teach us that he has no Wiſdom and Juſtice, and then we ſhould be ſoon agreed what Regard ought to be paid to his Revelation.

The Concluſion of the Whole is, That without Holineſs no Man ſhall ſee God; that Chriſt has, by redeeming us from Sin itſelf, and ſanctifying

tifying us to be an elect People peculiar to God, redeemed us from the Puniſhment of Sin: If we refuſe the Redemption from Sin, we ſhall never partake in the Redemption from the Puniſhment of it. All the Arts and Contrivances of Men to atone for their Sins without forſaking them, are Affronts to God, Contradictions to Reaſon, and ſuch as would effectually overthrow the Credit of any Revelation which ſhould profeſs them, but cannot poſſibly be ſupported by any; and, in fact, are utterly inconſiſtent with the Doctrine of the Goſpel.

Let us remember then, That *he only is righteous who doth righteouſly*; that thoſe only ſhall be truly happy who ſhall do the Works of God; whilſt the Hopes and Confidence of thoſe who lay great Claim to the Merits of Chriſt, but ſeek not after the Righteouſneſs of Chriſt, ſhall in the End be vain and deluſive: For the Word of the Lord ſhall ſtand, and be confirmed at the great Day, *Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

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